DOUBLE ISSUE

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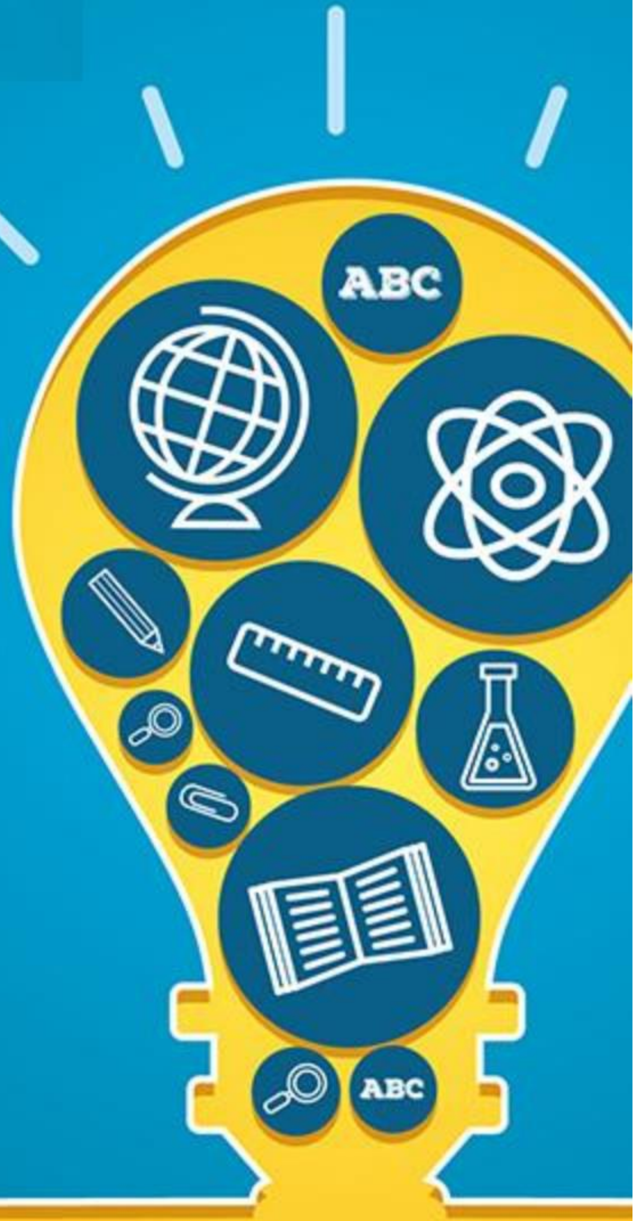
The Great Reopening

by JOANNE LIPMAN

TIME

WILL RETURN




ABC
ABC

TIME

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Max and Button on the family bus in Quartzsite, Ariz., on Feb. 8

Photograph by Nina Riggio for TIME

Features

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From the Editor



The editor's remote office

Building a better future

I WAS CATCHING UP THE OTHER DAY WITH A FRIEND, WHO ASKED HOW REMOTE WORK HAD been going, and I mentioned that sometimes late in the day, when my youngest child has had it with the closed door in the attic office space I share with my wife, I slip into the kids' backyard treehouse to finish my Zoom calls. We both laughed, and marveled at how much the pandemic had changed work and life. "I'm sure you're the first editor of TIME to work out of a treehouse," he said.

How much has changed? That's the question Joanne Lipman explores this week, with cities and businesses across the U.S. finally beginning to reopen. Distancing and mask requirements are being loosened for vaccinated people (though of course it's hard to tell who's been vaccinated). Major companies from JPMorgan to Eli Lilly have announced near-term dates for office workers to start returning in person. The New York City subway roared back to pre-pandemic 24/7 hours in May. (The commuter service in my town outside the city starts back up in a few weeks, so we'll see about the treehouse.)

"We have an unprecedented opportunity right now to reinvent, to create workplace culture almost from scratch," writes Lipman, an author and former top editor at the *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* who wrote a best seller on workplace culture. Lipman reminds us that the modern worker-office relationship, having been created after World War II on a military model ("strict hierarchies, created by men for men, with an assumption that there is a wife to handle duties at home"), is seriously dated. As with much else post-pandemic, this "Great Reopening," as Lipman puts it, presents us with a choice that is really an opportunity to define what the new normal becomes.

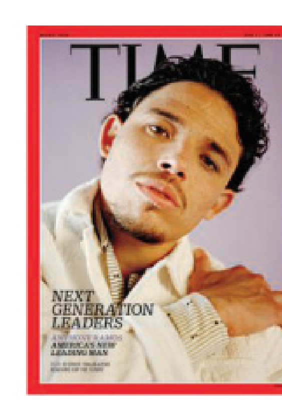
ON THE COVERS:



TIME photo-illustration



Photograph by Elliott Jerome Brown Jr. for TIME

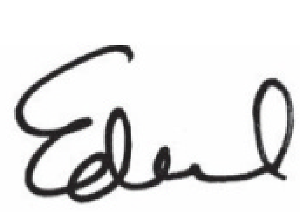


Photograph by Jingyu Lin for TIME

ONE OF THE JOYS of our work at TIME, especially in a year of so much hardship and despair, is the opportunity to elevate the people around the world who are building a better future. Since 2014, we have partnered with Rolex to shine a spotlight on Next Generation Leaders, rising stars in politics, business, culture, science and sports. Many may not be familiar names, at least not yet, while others are on the rise even as they have already crossed the threshold of fame. From this year's group, for example, the acting of Anthony Ramos will be well known to fans of *Hamilton* and the writing of Akwaeke Emezi to lovers of *The Death of Vivek Oji*. At TIME.com/nextgenleaders, you can watch video profiles of Ramos, Emezi and everyone on this year's list, which was overseen by senior editors Eliza Berman and Lily Rothman, with covers produced by senior photo editor Dilys Ng.

Looking back over the years at previous classes of Next Generation Leaders, it's amazing to see not only the trails they had blazed when we put them on the list but also what they have since gone on to accomplish. When Simone Biles was featured in 2016, the gymnast had yet to make her Olympics debut. She took home four gold medals at the Games that summer, and just this May completed a Yurchenko double pike, a first in recorded competition for women (and rare for men). Also in 2016, we noted that biochemist Feng Zhang was helping to "launch a CRISPR revolution." We knew that he was doing world-changing work in the exciting field of gene editing, but we couldn't have predicted the key role that genetic-based approaches would play in the development of two of the most effective vaccines to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the K-pop superstars BTS were featured in 2018, they were breaking into the U.S. market. Now, their Grammy-nominated English-language hit "Dynamite" has made them the first South Korean band to top the American singles chart. The 2018 list also included the Weeknd, who headlined the 2021 Super Bowl halftime show. In 2019, we highlighted how legal scholar Lina Khan was changing the way Americans thought about Big Tech; in March, President Biden nominated her to the Federal Trade Commission. And Greta Thunberg, of the 2019 list, holds the distinction of being the only Next Generation Leader to go on to become TIME's Person of the Year. So far, that is.



Edward Felsenthal,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF & CEO
@EFELSENTHAL

COVER: SIGN AND FASTENER, GETTY IMAGES (2); TREEHOUSE: COURTESY SOPHIE FELSENTHAL



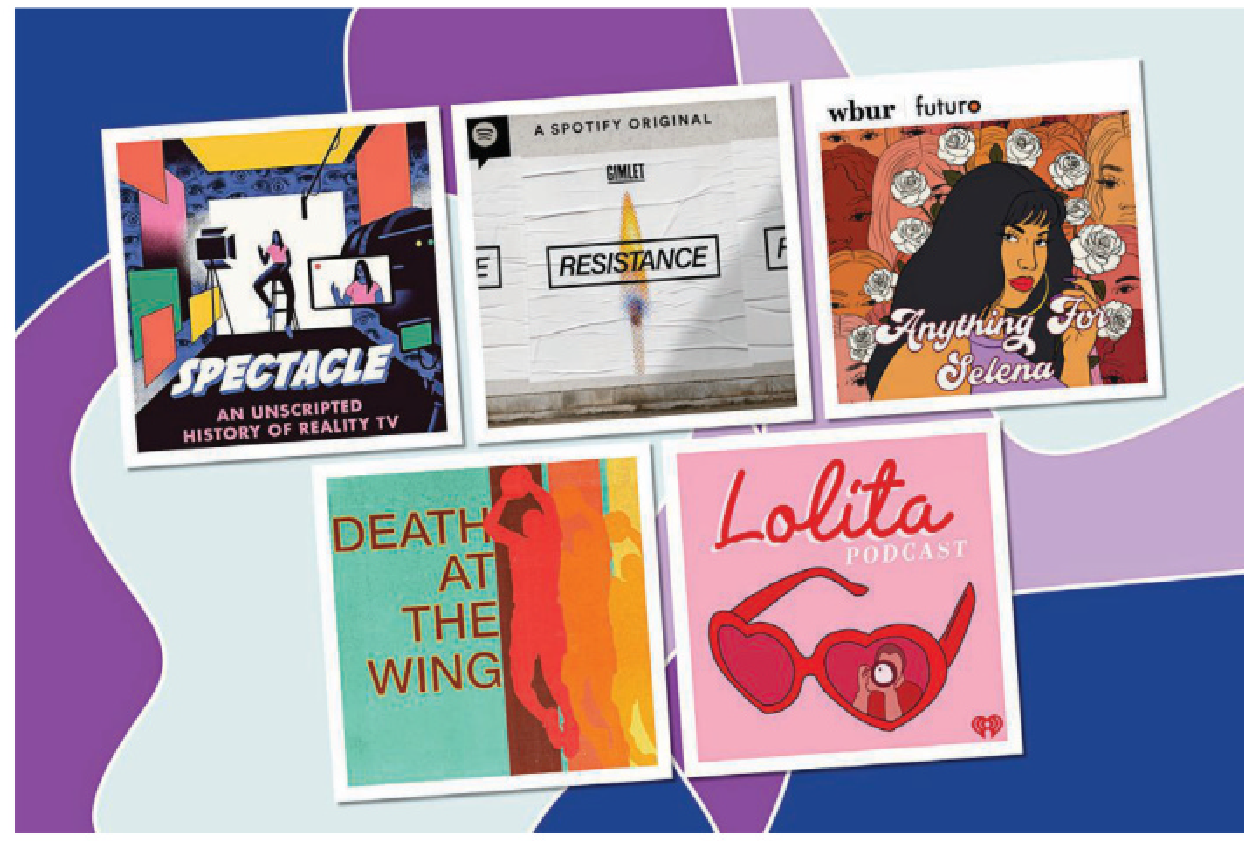
WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT ...

VISIONS OF EQUITY Readers found the feature package led by TIME's BIPOC staffers in the May 24/May 31 issue enlightening, especially a curated list of "40 ways forward: Actionable steps for a more equitable America." Robert Wheeler of St. Louis called it "a commendable wish list for an ideal society," while retired teacher Gayl Woityra of Maysville, Ky., hailed in particular a proposal for changes to public-school funding, which she labeled "a major cause of inequality in our nation." Some expressed concerns—amid a polarized political climate, as Alan Goldhammer of Berkeley, Calif., noted—as to how long it could take for such reforms to be implemented. "To eliminate discrimination there must be a change in culture" that "only time and knowledge can address," argued William S. Rodgers of Brentwood, Tenn. "The 'time' portion is likely best measured in generations, not years."

> ***'Thank you for a thought-provoking issue.'***
>
> TERRY L. CLASSEN, Eau Claire, Wis.

BUT READERS ALSO SAID they have faith that America is up to the task. "It takes our time, patience, courage, and persistent practice to dismantle and transform the heart of institutions and systems that engender racism," Heesoon Jun of Olympia, Wash., wrote. And Jordan Casteel, the artist who painted the issue's cover portrait, *God Bless the Child*, argued that an open mind is key: "Respecting and valuing all human life—to seek real equity—requires unlearning, learning, empathy, listening and making space for more than numbers around the table but voices in the room," she wrote on Instagram.

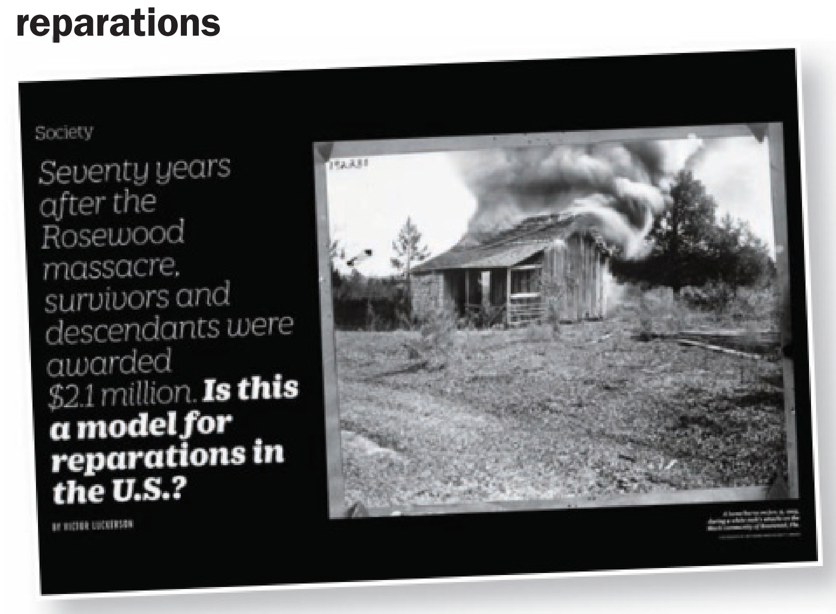
> ***'We've come a long way but still have a long road ahead.'***
>
> DR. RACHEL LEVINE, U.S. Assistant Secretary for Health



An earful

TIME's culture critics have compiled lists of the best of the year so far, including 10 podcast recommendations ranging from Internet culture *(ICYMI)* to "mom influencer" media *(Under the Influence)*, Black Lives Matter protests *(Resistance)* to male exotic dancing *(Welcome to Your Fantasy)* and beyond. Find the list—plus links to recommended albums, TV shows, books and movies—at **time.com/podcasts-2021**

HONORS TIME is nominated for three 2021 National Magazine Awards: for video journalism (for "Anatomy of Hate," in partnership with the Marshall Project), feature photography (for "Faces of Protest") and in the new coverage of race in America category for Victor Luckerson's feature on Black families' quest for justice after a racially motivated mass killing, which you can read at **time.com/reparations**


Society

Seventy years after the Rosewood massacre, survivors and descendants were awarded $2.1 million. **Is this a model for reparations in the U.S.?**

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For the Record

'Aung San Suu Kyi is always confident in herself, and she is confident in her cause and confident in the people.'

KHIN MAUNG ZAW,
lawyer for the former Myanmar leader, speaking with the AP on May 24 ahead of her first appearance in court since her Feb. 1 arrest by the country's military junta

'It brings indescribable sadness to know that the BBC's failures contributed significantly to her fear, paranoia and isolation.'

PRINCE WILLIAM,
in a May 20 statement responding to the results of an investigation that found former BBC reporter Martin Bashir had faked documents and lied to secure his famed 1995 interview with William's mother Princess Diana

'I AM 107 YEARS OLD AND HAVE NEVER SEEN JUSTICE.'

VIOLA FLETCHER,
the oldest known survivor of the 1921 Tulsa, Okla., race massacre—in which a white mob stormed and burned down a prosperous Black neighborhood—testifying before Congress on May 19

'Poser, blockhead, riffraff, jerk face.'

THE LINDA LINDAS,
a Los Angeles–based Asian and Latinx teen punk band, in lyrics to their song "Racist Sexist Boy"; after video from a May 4 performance went viral, the band signed with independent label Epitaph Records on May 22

'I survived so that I could tell the story. That's what I'm here for.'

BILLY PORTER,
Pose actor, disclosing that he has lived with HIV for more than 14 years, in an interview with the *Hollywood Reporter* published on May 19



80

Number of student yearbook photos altered after faculty at a Florida high school deemed them violations of a dress code that says girls' shirts must be "modest," the school told local news on May 21



GOOD NEWS
of the week

A World Wildlife Fund report released on May 24 found that the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred bans on the sale of wildlife across Asia and the U.S., as well as lowered its consumption, which could help reduce future zoonotic disease outbreaks

108.2 MILLION

Number of views tallied for the music video for K-pop group BTS's latest single, "Butter," in the first 24 hours after its release on May 20—a YouTube record



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BROWN BIRD DESIGN FOR TIME

SOURCES: NPR; THE WASHINGTON POST; BBC; NEWS 4 JAX; BUZZFEED NEWS; VARIETY

The Brief

NO ESCAPE
As air travel resumes this summer, airlines are finally tackling emissions



INSIDE

'AVIATION PIRACY' AFTER ACTIVIST ARRESTED ON PLANE

TEAHOUSE CLUSTERS SPUR COVID-19 SURGE IN TAIWAN

SIMONE BILES LANDS NEW GYMNASTICS RECORD

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL MARRIOTT

The Brief is reported by Madeleine Carlisle, Suyin Haynes, Sanya Mansoor, Ciara Nugent, Billy Perrigo, Madeline Roache and Olivia B. Waxman

CLIMATE

Emissions tests for airlines

By Ciara Nugent

VACCINATED AMERICANS WILL BE ABLE TO visit Europe this summer, after E.U. leaders agreed to open the bloc's borders to foreign tourists on May 18. Although the E.U. hasn't set an exact date for the reopening, the news is a boon for the air-travel industry, which suffered plunging revenues due to COVID-19 restrictions. Bookings for highly lucrative transatlantic routes have surged, and executives are enthusiastically touting the concept of "revenge travel," predicting passengers will fly more than usual in 2021 to make up for months of being grounded.

But revenge on the virus comes at a cost for the climate. The pandemic succeeded at something policymakers and campaigners have been powerless to do: ending decades of almost uninterrupted rapid growth in aviation's carbon dioxide emissions, which fell by a record 48% in 2020. As air travel returns long term, the sector's emissions are still projected to grow—by a lot. Before COVID-19 hit, the aviation sector's carbon emissions were expected to be three times as great in 2050 as in 2015. Analysts now put the figure at closer to 2.3 times.

Aviation is one of the hardest sectors of the global economy to decarbonize, because low-carbon jet fuels and aircraft are much less well developed than clean electricity or road transport. The sector currently makes up 2.5% of global emissions, and that share is expected to grow in the coming years.

As travelers return to the skies, governments are trying to preserve some of the progress made on emissions levels during the pandemic. On April 10, French lawmakers voted to outlaw some short-haul domestic flights where rail alternatives are available. A week later, the U.K. became the first major economy to include aviation emissions in its national carbon budget, setting what campaigners call an important precedent. On May 20, three U.S. Representatives introduced a bill—backed by both the aviation industry and environmental groups—to create a tax credit for the use of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), which can cut emissions by up to 80%.

Airlines' reliance on public bailout funding during the pandemic has emboldened governments to demand more action, according to Andrew Murphy, aviation director at European clean-transit campaign group Transport and Environment. "Before the pandemic, the sector was quite arrogant in feeling that it didn't need to make the same sort of cuts and transformations that other sectors were doing," he says. "Now the politics has changed."

In recent months, dozens of airlines have pledged to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, compared with previous industry-wide plans to halve emissions by 2050. In the short term, those plans rely heavily on paying other sectors to reduce their emissions or absorb carbon from the atmosphere, but such schemes can be flawed.

THE INDUSTRY'S BIGGEST bet for its future sustainability is a pivot from highly polluting kerosene to cleaner—though not carbon-neutral—biofuels, made from sources such as cooking oil or waste vegetation. Prepandemic, these fuels made up just 0.01% of the aviation industry's total fuel use. But several airlines have announced plans to increase the proportion of sustainable fuels they use to around 10% by 2030. The E.U. is expected to set all carriers a target of "around" 5% by 2030.

48%

Drop in aviation's annual carbon emissions from 2019 to 2020, due to COVID-19 restrictions

2.3

Factor by which aviation experts expect the sector's carbon emissions to grow by 2050, compared with 2015

11%

Share of the world's population who took a flight in 2018

Supply chains would need to develop rapidly to meet those targets, and aviation trade groups have called on governments to create grants and tax breaks to stimulate production, and to fund research into the radical new aircraft technology and cleaner "e-fuels" necessary to eventually reach zero-carbon flight.

Many climate activists say it's wrong for the aviation sector or oil companies—which have invested in SAF—to receive public funds to develop technologies they need to protect their bottom lines as they face increased climate regulation. Campaigners argue that any public funds for airlines should come with strict climate conditions. It can be done: Austria's government made its bailout of Lufthansa's Austrian Airlines unit last year dependent on the carrier's cutting back domestic routes and setting new emissions and fuel-efficiency targets.

For now, the most effective way to reduce aviation emissions is by avoiding travel. The pandemic may have helped. Companies are reassessing the value of business travel after a year of conducting meetings over videoconference. Only a third of business travelers in the U.K. expect to return to their prepandemic habits, according to an April poll. The consultancy McKinsey says a fall in business travel, which accounts for up to 75% of revenues on some routes, could force airlines to take measures such as reducing the frequency of flights, raising prices or closing price gaps for direct and connecting flights, all of which would help to indirectly reduce emissions.

Before the pandemic, the "flight shame" movement, popularized by climate activist Greta Thunberg, had also begun to have a "real impact" on demand for short-haul air travel in Europe, says Dan Rutherford, aviation director at the International Council on Clean Transportation. "That big change in attitudes that started in 2019 has not gone away, and we're going to see those political pressures build as the industry recovers from COVID." ◻

PREVIOUS PAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK; THESE PAGES: KEREM YUCEL—AFP/GETTY IMAGES



ONE YEAR ON Jay Webb and Damik Wright work on a memorial garden at George Floyd Square in Minneapolis on May 25. Wright is the brother of Daunte Wright, a Black man who was killed by a Minnesota police officer in April as the trial for Derek Chauvin—the former officer now convicted of Floyd's murder—was under way. Floyd's family met President Joe Biden at the White House on May 25, the first anniversary of his death, to discuss police-reform legislation. —*Josiah Bates*

WORLD

'Aviation piracy' shocks the world as Belarus detains dissident

A COMMERCIAL FLIGHT FROM ATHENS HAD almost reached its destination of Vilnius, Lithuania, on the afternoon of May 23 when a Belarusian fighter jet sped toward it in midair, ordering its pilots to divert to Minsk, Belarus' capital. Once the aircraft was on the ground, security agents forcibly removed journalist Roman Protasevich, 26, and his girlfriend, law student Sofia Sapega, 23, from the plane and detained them—an incident the airline later labeled "aviation piracy." And for those fighting to end the 27-year rule of Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko, any sense of safety within the E.U. has since vanished.

PRESS FREEDOMS The arrest of Protasevich, a co-founder of Nexta, a hugely popular news channel run by Belarusian dissidents on the Telegram platform, is part of a crackdown in recent weeks on nongovernment media in Belarus. In December, Nexta's other co-founder, Stsiapan Putsila, told TIME that hundreds of people were risking arrest by smuggling them images of torture and arrests. "It is very dangerous," said Putsila, who now lives in Poland. "But their will to share the information is more significant."

POWER TRIPS The crisis erupted last August, when Lukashenko—whom some call "Europe's last dictator"—declared himself victorious in an election that many in Belarus believed the now exiled opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya had actually won. "This event showed that the escalation is a result of impunity and the lack of attention," Tikhanovskaya tells TIME. "Lukashenko thinks nobody can do anything, so he thinks, 'I'll do anything I want.'"

CONTINENTAL DIVIDE E.U. officials had previously stopped short of tough measures against Lukashenko and his inner circle, in part because of divisions within Europe over how to deal with Belarus' neighbor and ally, Russia. But the plane's forced landing was top of the agenda as E.U. leaders gathered in Brussels on May 24; they demanded the immediate release of Protasevich and Sapega, imposed a ban on Belarusian airlines using E.U. airspace and airports, and agreed to expand economic sanctions. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has called the incident a "brazen and shocking act" and demanded an international investigation. —VIVIENNE WALT

NEWS TICKER

N.Y. grand jury convened for Trump probe

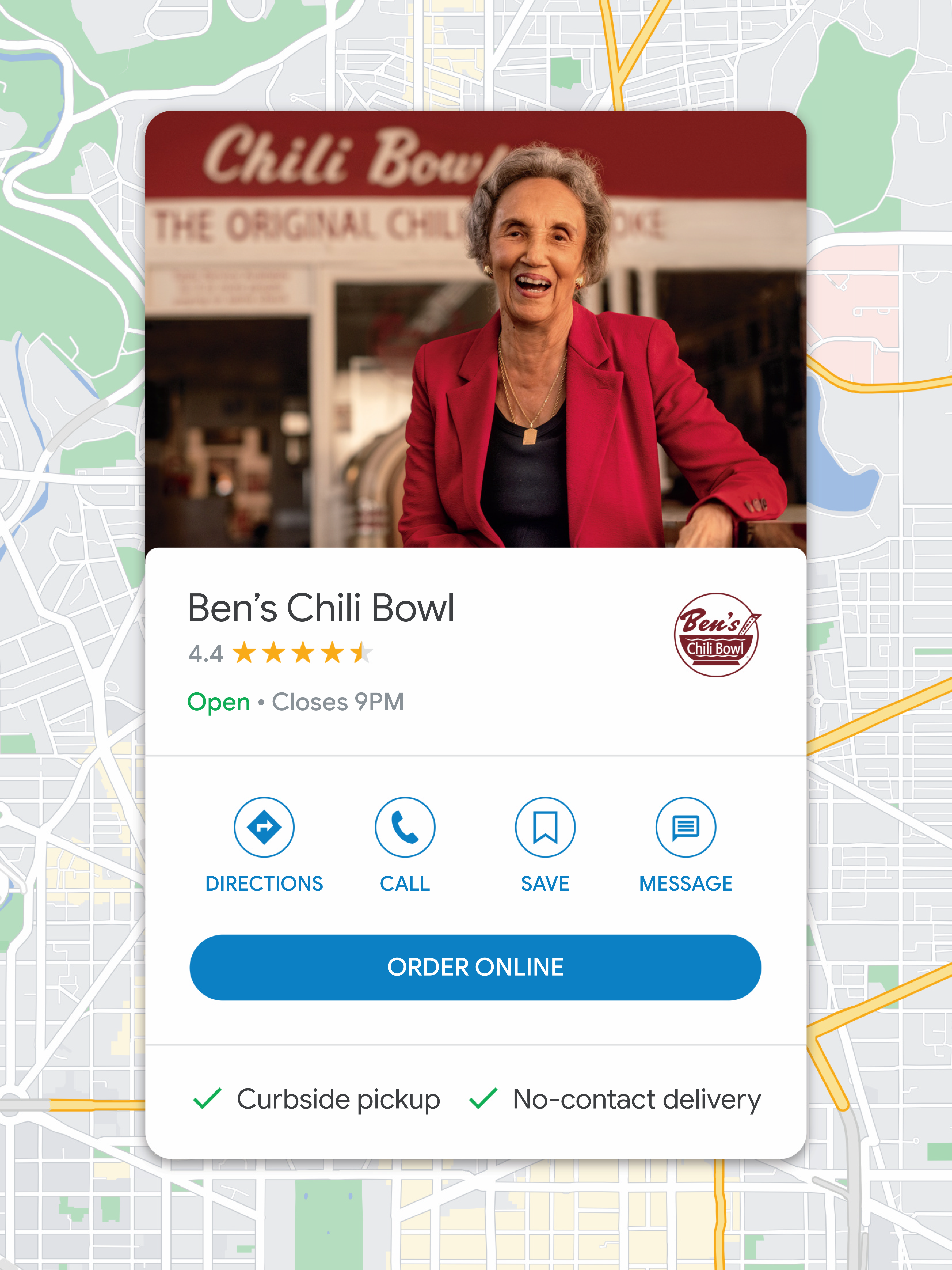
Prosecutors in New York have convened a special grand jury to determine whether former President Donald Trump should be **indicted on criminal charges related to his "business dealings,"** the Associated Press reported on May 26. Trump has denied any wrongdoing.

India seeks removal of 'variant' posts

In a May 21 letter, India's Information Technology Ministry asked social media firms to remove **content on their platforms referring to the "Indian variant"** of COVID-19, calling such references "false." The World Health Organization has warned against location-based names for variants, but many place names have become widely used.

CDC: Stop kissing your chickens

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said May 20 that recent salmonella outbreaks—including at least 163 illnesses and 34 hospitalizations in 43 states—are likely due to contact with backyard or domestic poultry and **urged Americans not to "kiss or snuggle the birds."**


Ben's Chili Bowl
4.4
Open • Closes 9PM
Ben's
Chili Bowl
DIRECTIONS
CALL
SAVE
MESSAGE
ORDER ONLINE
Curbside pickup
No-contact delivery

NEWS TICKER

Ultramarathon runners die in storm

Twenty-one people died on May 22 after **extreme weather, including hail, freezing rain and high winds,** hit a cross-country mountain ultramarathon race in northern China. More than 1,200 rescuers were deployed as part of recovery operations, state media said, as anger mounted on social media over the event's planning.

Texas poised to loosen handgun laws

State lawmakers passed legislation on May 24 that would allow **Texans to carry a handgun without a background check, license or required training.** Governor Greg Abbott has said he will sign the bill into law, despite warnings from gun-safety advocates and law-enforcement groups that it poses risks to police and public safety.

Leaders spar amid Samoan election crisis

After a tight election in April, Samoa's incumbent government **blocked a transition of power to Prime Minister–elect Fiame Naomi Mata'afa,** who took the oath of office in a tent outside the locked parliament on May 24. Mata'afa would be the Pacific nation's first female leader.



BUSINESS

Viral fame and fortune

On May 22, the family behind "Charlie Bit My Finger," one of YouTube's most popular videos, **sold their 2007 footage for nearly $800,000** as a non-fungible token, or NFT, and now plans to remove it from YouTube. The auction followed a number of other Internet-famous faces cashing in on their memes' popularity. —*Raisa Bruner*

DISASTER GIRL
Zoë Roth became a popular meme in 2007 after a childhood photo of her posing with a devilish smile in front of a burning house went viral. Many on social media have since used the image to share feelings of schadenfreude; Roth sold the image for nearly $500,000 in April.

BAD LUCK BRIAN
Kyle Craven gained Internet notoriety in 2012 when a friend uploaded a not-so-flattering school photo to Reddit. It's since become a classic "cringe" meme, used to express feeling awkward or embarrassed. Craven auctioned it as an NFT for about $36,000 in March.

OVERLY ATTACHED GIRLFRIEND
Laina Morris sold a viral photo of her wide-eyed, manic-grinning face, invoked to illustrate overzealous enthusiasm, for over $400,000 in April to a Dubai-based collector who also purchased Disaster Girl and the "Charlie Bit My Finger" video.

GOOD QUESTION

Why are Taiwan's COVID-19 defenses failing now?

ALL IT TOOK TO BREAK DOWN THE WORLD'S most vaunted COVID-19 defense was a little tea. After almost 18 months of nearly unblemished pandemic success, Taiwan is in the grip of its first major COVID-19 surge. Total cases more than tripled in a little over a week to more than 6,100 as of May 26. Many offices sent workers home, the streets of the capital, Taipei, cleared out, and the government began scrambling to secure vaccines and improve one of the worst inoculation rates in the developed world.

The bulk of the surge can be traced back to two sources: a local Lions Club International gathering, and teahouses in a Taipei red-light district. The two clusters were at first thought to be unrelated—until a former Lions Club president revealed that he had visited one of the teahouses. The civic leader, nicknamed the Lion King by local media, had at least 115 contacts while potentially infectious, demonstrating just how vulnerable the island of 23 million was to a major outbreak.

At the start of the pandemic, Taiwan imposed world-leading infection-control measures including invasive contact tracing, travel bans and mandatory quarantines, but it began to let down its guard last summer. Thousands gathered at concerts, baseball games and religious festivals. Large meals and family gatherings became more common, and masks less.

But why did Taiwan's COVID-19 protocols fail after holding out through the worst of COVID-19? "Life will find its way out," says Dr. Chen Chien-jen, an epidemiologist and former Vice President of Taiwan. The majority of recent cases are of a more infectious variant of the virus that was first detected in the U.K. Chen adds that the poorly ventilated red-light teahouses, where older men keep company with hostesses and often move between establishments, provided fertile ground for the virus to spread.

Lapses in Taiwan's safety protocols are also to blame. The outbreak appears to have started at a hotel where quarantined flight crews stayed in the same building with non-quarantined guests. (Authorities also reduced quarantine for cargo crews from five days to just three.) Compounding the problem, Taiwan badly lags in vaccinations, with less than 2% of the population getting a shot, thanks to both low demand and poor supply.

The good news is Taiwan appears to be benefiting from COVID-19 transmission lessons that the rest of the world learned the hard way. The government swiftly opened testing centers in hot spots, restricted gatherings and shut down schools. And many Taiwanese started staying home even before the government stepped up restrictions. "I know that we're experiencing what happened abroad about a year ago," says Ya-chu Chuang, 28, from New Taipei City. "As long as we all do what we can and follow the instructions, we will be able to overcome this crisis." —MICHAEL ZENNIE *and* GLADYS TSAI/TAIPEI

CHARLIE BIT MY FINGER: WEB PIX/ALAMY; YUAN: XINHUA/SIPA USA; BILES: AJ MAST—AP

Milestones

DIED
Lee Evans, the Black American athlete who famously raised his fist to protest racism while accepting a gold medal at the 1968 Olympics, on May 19 at 74.
> **Samuel E. Wright,** the Tony-nominated actor who voiced Sebastian in the Disney film *The Little Mermaid,* on May 24 at 74.

WON
The **2021 PGA Championship, on May 23, by Phil Mickelson at age 50,** the oldest champion for a major golf tournament.
> The **2021 Eurovision Song Contest, by Italy,** represented by the glam-rock band Maneskin, on May 22.

CALVED
A massive berg from the edge of Antarctica's Ronne Ice Shelf, researchers said May 14, **becoming the largest iceberg currently floating.**

STOLEN
A set of **rosary beads carried by Mary, Queen of Scots,** at her 1586 execution—among other artifacts—during a May 21 robbery of Arundel Castle in the United Kingdom.

CAST
Brooke Blurton on May 19 as the latest Bachelorette in Australia's version of the dating reality show, becoming its **first openly bisexual lead.**

BOUGHT
The famed Hollywood film studio **MGM, by Amazon** in an $8.45 billion deal, the tech giant said May 26.

DIED

Yuan Longping

Created a land of plenty with hybrid rice

By Charlie Campbell/Shanghai

CHINA'S TRANSFORMATION FROM A LAND OF FAMINE TO ONE OF plenty owes much to plant scientist Yuan Longping, who died on May 22 in the central city of Changsha at the age of 90. Known as the father of hybrid rice, Yuan pioneered the world's first hybrid varieties in the 1970s that increased yields by some 30%. Today one-fifth of the rice grown globally is hybrid, saving lives and boosting livelihoods, especially across Asia and Africa. Yuan received the World Food Prize in 2004, and the death of "Grandpa Yuan" sparked an outpouring of grief and gratitude across China.

Yuan was a teacher at an agricultural college in the 1950s when Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward triggered modern history's worst famine, claiming tens of millions of lives. Moved to action by the emaciated corpses he stumbled across while himself subsisting on grass roots and tree bark, Yuan grew "determined to solve the problem of how to increase food production so that ordinary people would not starve," he wrote in his 2010 memoir.

Despite a slew of state honors, Yuan never joined China's ruling Communist Party, believing that politics and science shouldn't mix. But the party has spun his death no less, with President Xi Jinping paying tribute: "Our best memorial to Comrade Yuan Longping is to learn from him."





LANDED

Simone Biles' Yurchenko double pike

EXPECTATIONS WERE HIGH for gymnast Simone Biles' return to competition after a 1½-year hiatus, but she flew past them when she powered up a new vault at the U.S. Classic in Indianapolis on May 22.

There, Biles became the first female gymnast to perform the Yurchenko double pike vault in competition—a move that involves not one but two full flips in the air after a roundoff and a back handspring. It's considered so risky that judges downgraded its difficulty value in an effort to discourage less skilled tumblers; while Biles had so much power that she couldn't hold her landing, she still received the competition's highest vault score. "I was just thinking, Do it like training," Biles said of the history-making feat. "I was proud of how today went."

The most dominant athlete in gymnastics in recent years, Biles is surely looking to add to her already expansive Olympic medal collection in Tokyo this summer. And when asked at the U.S. Classic why she continues to push boundaries in her sport, Biles replied simply, "Because I can." —ALICE PARK

^ *Biles, in midair, at the U.S. Classic gymnastics competition on May 22*



LightBox

Deadly flow

Destroyed buildings in Bushara village, outside the city of Goma in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, are pictured on May 23, the day after nearby Mount Nyiragongo erupted, forcing thousands to flee a wave of boiling lava. A day later, officials said at least 32 people had been killed as a result of the volcano's eruption, with the death toll expected to rise. The lava flow stopped just outside Goma, which had been inundated in a 2002 eruption.

Photograph by Justin Katumwa—AFP/Getty Images

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The View

HEALTH

OUR EYES ON THE VIRUS

By Michael J. Mina

The vaccines are here. Why do we still need testing? Testing is our eye on the virus. Without testing, we can't see where it is or where it is going. As fall and winter set in, outbreaks will again occur, sparked by the unvaccinated. And most people become infectious before they know they are infected. And testing can help stop this cycle.



A COVID-19 home-test kit being handed out in the Netherlands in 2020

KOEN VAN WEEL—EPA-EFE/SHUTTERSTOCK

But the vaccines are here. Why do we still need testing?

With cases now growing around the world, particularly because of more-transmissible variants, we should be utilizing testing to prevent and control cases and outbreaks when they arise. The new guidance by the CDC, allowing vaccinated individuals to stop social distancing and to remove their masks in a wide variety of settings, should have been introduced with complementary at-home rapid testing for all. We've seen examples of unvaccinated individuals transmitting to vaccinated residents in nursing homes.

We also know that according to the CDC, although a majority of American adults have received at least one dose of the vaccine, the rate of uptake isn't consistent across the country. In Mississippi, for example, only 31% of the population has received at least one dose. We should be doing everything we can to expand access to the vaccine and persuade more people to get vaccinated, but we should also be smarter about testing.

We have already seen new variants that spread more quickly, and there's the potential for others to develop increased ability to evade vaccine-derived immunity that could threaten the gains that vaccines have made. When this happens, the virus could again find its way into senior centers and nursing homes. Seniors have a more limited capacity to retain highly effective immune protection over time. By late fall and winter, after almost a year since vaccination, many elderly people might again have partially renewed susceptibility.

We should be investing today in widespread rapid testing to fully reopen the economy, schools and travel safely

AS WE NAVIGATE the next chapter of the pandemic and work our way closer to normality, it is essential that we leverage accurate and highly accessible rapid testing to keep schools, workplaces and travel open in the safest way possible.

By rapid tests, I mean those that individuals can conduct without a laboratory (ideally in the privacy of their own homes) with results given in real time. There are two types. The first is a rapid antigen test, which looks for the virus's proteins and detects infectious levels of virus. The other lets you know you've been infected: rapid molecular tests accurately detect the virus's RNA and amplify it to confirm infection—sometimes days before the individual shows any symptoms.

Despite bipartisan, national support, the U.S. has failed to adopt a robust at-home rapid-testing strategy that could make these types of tests available to all Americans at little to no cost to them.

We know with certainty that individuals don't need to have symptoms to infect others with COVID-19. The virus presents itself differently in everyone, and most individuals are infectious for a number of days before showing any symptoms (if ever). After infection, the virus gets itself situated before beginning to replicate very rapidly. Once it hits its stride, in a single day the virus grows from hundreds of virus particles in the nose, to billions. At that point, transmission can hit its peak, before the person knows that they might be spewing out virus particles with every breath.

This is a major reason why SARS-CoV-2 has been so difficult to contain—because maximum transmission is often occurring before the body's sensors kick in to let people know they may be infected. Regular rapid testing can allow contagious individuals to know they are infected and to isolate.

The White House has focused on vaccines over testing, but why not give each household a box of 20 free rapid at-home tests after a family member gets vaccinated? Surveys show that Americans want accessible, inexpensive (or free) rapid testing. There are a handful of FDA-authorized at-home rapid antigen and molecular tests available for over-the-counter use, but the price is high and the supply isn't anywhere near what it should be. The U.S. government should be subsidizing test manufacturing and assisting in the distribution.

We know that the combination of vaccines and rapid tests will drive down community transmission to a point where we can effectively eliminate the virus. We should be investing today in widespread rapid testing to fully reopen the economy, schools and travel safely. Not doing so may well cause more hospitalization and death, and prolong the pandemic.

Mina is a professor of epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. He is a medical adviser to Detect

ESSAY

The pandemic changed my outlook on life

By Connie Schultz

EIGHT DAYS AFTER I WAS FULLY VACCINATED, I BOARDED MY first flight in 16 months. What a moment. I settled into my seat and took a deep breath, sucking in my mask to give it that nice, sealed plastic-wrap feeling. Then I combed my fingers through my hair and ignited a fire on the right side of my scalp.

What was this? I gently patted my head, which remained cool to the touch. Slowly, I walked my fingertips into my hairline and discovered one bump, two bumps, three bumps. I raised my right eyebrow and felt the sting of a dozen bees.

Shingles. Because, why not?

It ended up being a mild case, but I didn't know that then. What I did know was that everyone in my daughter's house had been vaccinated against chicken pox, and no one would touch three bumps burrowed under my boxwood bush of hair. Nothing was going to stop me from seeing the two young grandchildren waiting for me in New England. For 16 months, they had known me only as the grandma whose face fits into their mother's phone. I couldn't wait for them to see my sneakers.

Schultz with two of her grandchildren in April



By the time my daughter picked me up at the airport, I had Googled what I needed to know about shingles. My habit. After a phone consultation, my doctor called in a prescription to a drugstore near my daughter's house. Two hours later, when I dropped to my knees in the preschool foyer and wrapped my arms around those giggling babies, I had decided I was done worrying. I spent the next 2½ days feeling honored to wear a Wonder Woman tiara wrapped around my head.

This refusal to fret is not remotely my habit, but after a year of loss and worrying that I might never again see all the people I love, I am a changed woman. I hereby resign from my full-time volunteer job as conjurer of worst-case scenarios. Let somebody else borrow trouble, as my grandmother used to put it. I have seen the worst, and I am ready to expect the best.

I hereby resign from my full-time volunteer job as conjurer of worst-case scenarios

This will require me to overlook some things.

Death mongers, for example. After the country was shut down last spring, some people started offering unsolicited advice as to whose lives were worth saving during a pandemic. Texas' Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, for example, suggested that grandparents like him were ready to sacrifice their lives to keep the economy running for their grandchildren. I may have said, "You first, Dan," and Grandma is not proud of this. On Twitter, I noticed a smattering of similar messages coming mostly from people younger and more conservative than I. Something along the lines of, "Hey old people, you've had a good run but I still want to eat at restaurants, so see ya." Being 63, I may have escaped their first round of expiration dates, but the longer the pandemic dragged on, the closer I could feel their price guns stamping in my direction. *Grandma clearance sale, Aisle 7.*

For a while, I collected screenshots of the worst of these posts. Boy, was that going to be an essay. At some point, though, I remembered that lecture I used to give my kids. About how our energy is like a bank account, and we can spend only so much of it on any given day. "Invest wisely," I used to tell them. Amazingly, they still speak to me.

So, fine, I'm taking my own advice. I'm over those ageists. Besides, if they're lucky, they'll live long enough to regret ever thinking age is anything but an entitlement. I know how this works. I'm a boomer, remember.

REUNIONS ARE UPON US. Each new gathering of friends, I find, includes a conversation about How We've Changed. The conclusion is always the same: We're not sure. Not yet. I do sense a collective hope that we'll leave behind those parts we've outgrown, regardless of age. Pettiness. Spanx. Fear of dying.

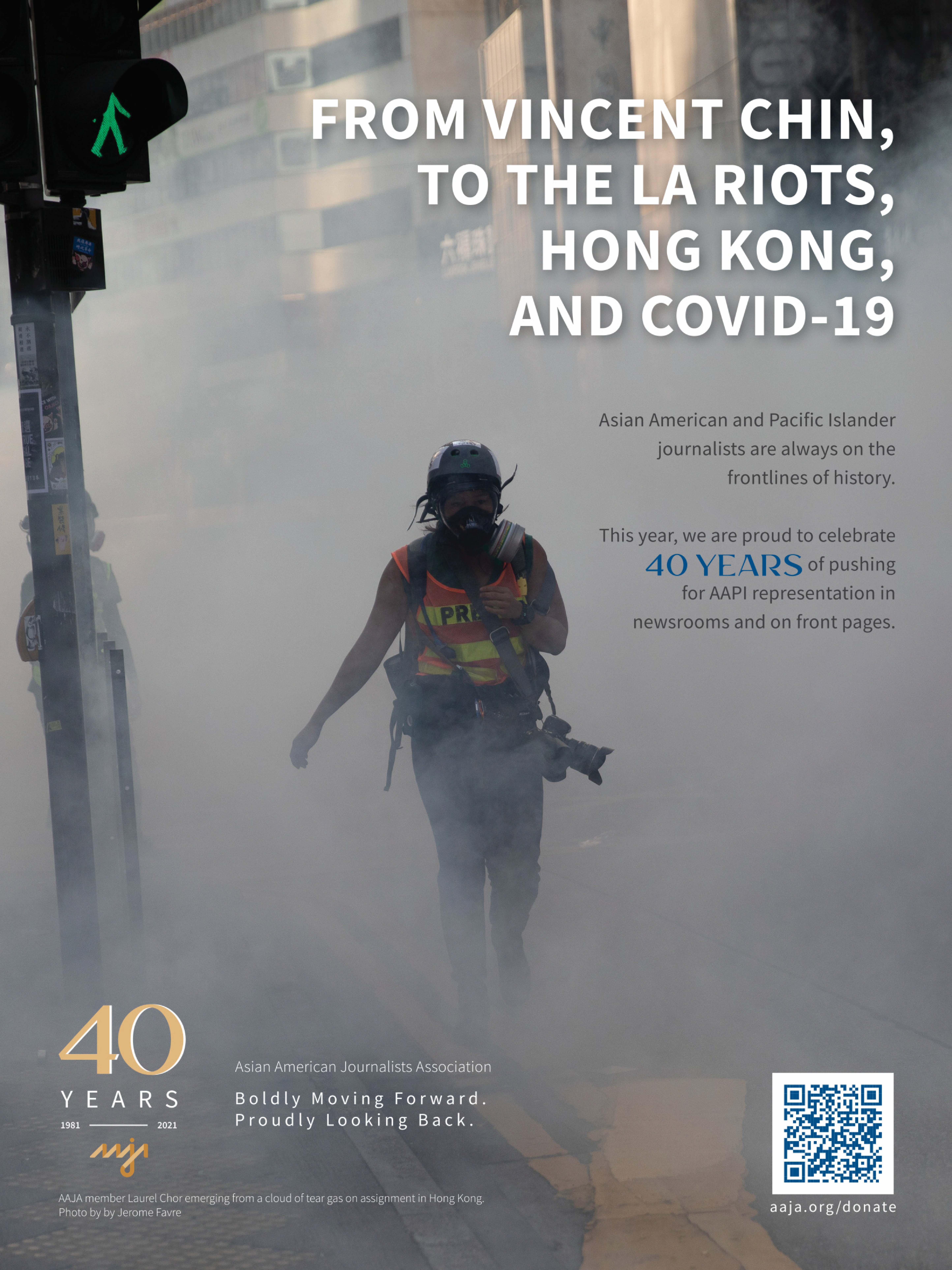
I see signs of change in unexpected moments. After my return flight to Cleveland, I kept my promise to my doctor and visited an urgent care. I was instructed to drop everything and race to an emergency room to make sure shingles was not threatening my eye. I didn't panic. I didn't even walk quickly to my car or ask anyone to meet me at the hospital.

I reminded myself I didn't have COVID-19 and drove the 8.6 miles to the hospital imagining designs for pretty eye patches I'd wear after a doctor plucked my eyeball like a grape off the vine. (My eye was fine, as it turns out.)

This is the new, previously unimaginable me. Just wanted you to know.

Schultz is a Pulitzer Prize–winning columnist and the author of The Daughters of Erietown

COURTESY CONNIE SCHULTZ



AAJA member Laurel Chor emerging from a cloud of tear gas on assignment in Hong Kong.
Photo by by Jerome Favre

The View

UPLIFTING AAPI VOICES

This May, in recognition of **Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month,** TIME held its first Uplifting AAPI Voices Summit—a celebration of the diversity and achievements of the AAPI community that brought together Senator **Mazie Hirono,** designer **Prabal Gurung,** actor **Constance Wu,** performer **Lea Salonga** and other influential voices for conversations on identity, creativity, leadership and equity. Highlights from the summit—which can be viewed at **time.com/aapi-voices**—are presented here alongside a new essay from author **Nicole Chung.**



From left: Wu and Han in virtual conversation

Constance Wu and Jenny Han on the power of inclusive storytelling

IN CONVERSATION WITH *TIME* SENIOR EDITOR LUCY Feldman, actor Constance Wu and *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* author Jenny Han discussed their groundbreaking work both in front of and behind the camera, the need for nuanced AAPI representation and their love for a good rom-com.

TIME: When the film adaptations of *Crazy Rich Asians* and *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* first came out, there was a whole generation of Asian Americans who had never seen ourselves reflected like that. What did those films mean to you? And how did they change things?

WU: I was in a unique position, having that happen to me with two big-profile projects: first there was *Fresh Off the Boat,* which was seeing yourself represented on network American TV. That was something that really hadn't happened in a long time. *Crazy Rich Asians* was on a bigger scale. People used to say, "Oh, well, she can't carry a show. She can't carry a movie." But that's why it was hard for Asian Americans—they couldn't carry a show or movie because nobody had ever let them. With *Crazy Rich Asians,* with *To All the Boys,* with *Minari* or *The Farewell,* we are truly seeing that it's not the lack of talent. It's been the lack of opportunity.

HAN: I've been in the publishing space for a long time now, and I've been a part of many firsts. It's exciting. At the same time, you're hoping at a certain point [that] you're not going to be the first to do something.

Jenny, you ended up working with the one production company that didn't insist that Lara Jean be played by a white teen. When you look back on that, does it feel far away? Or does it feel like an ongoing battle?

HAN: I think the conversation has moved very quickly. I mean, this was 2014; not that long ago. Those were really hard conversations to have, because there was no vocabulary. With *To All the Boys,* I was nervous up until we started shooting … [I] had to hold the line in terms of saying, "No, I'm not going to do that." That was its own challenge.

'There's a lack of imagination of the types of faces and bodies we think are worthy of love.'

WU: It's a hard topic to broach because people often get defensive, and think you're accusing them of racism. Sometimes people will be like, "I just can't see an Asian American as the lead of a romantic movie." There's a lack of imagination of the types of faces and bodies we think are worthy of love; of course, an Asian-American man can be a sex symbol or an object of affection. But why does it always have to be somebody with six-pack abs? If you look at white actors, there are plenty of movies where the white nerd becomes the romantic lead. I don't really desire six-pack abs. I desire pizza.

So often when we talk about representation in media, people go to a place of "We need to tell really serious stories." And those are important, but so is joy. What draws you both to the rom-com genre?

HAN: This is what I like to watch. I think for a long time if you saw a book about a person of color, it was always going to be a story of sorrow and about their struggle with being a person of color. And I was really intentional with *To All the Boys* about wanting to do something that was really where [Lara Jean's] identity wasn't the point of the whole story—it wasn't having to justify her being Asian. And having the imagination to say an all-American girl looks so many different ways.

WU: Love is the greatest thing in the world. And so is laughter. In any of my projects, I think if something is really deep or dramatic, I always try to make sure I find the levity in it. Same thing if something is really comedic and light: I always try to make sure I find the depth that it springs from, because otherwise it's just like cotton candy.

Are there narratives that we need to get better at telling? Are there specific

stories that you'd love to see more of in Hollywood?
HAN: I think just a wider expanse of kinds of stories; having that bigger palette to draw from. I think that we've really proven that we can do well, so I hope that people will take more chances on stories that we're not seeing as much.

It feels like sometimes there's a fine line between representation and tokenism where, in a better world, Asian-American creatives would be able to just do work that feels most authentic to them and be embraced for that. How do you navigate that?
WU: For me, avoiding tokenism … has been looking for roles where the character doesn't only exist as a means to tell somebody else's story. They need to have families, joys, sorrows, loves, enemies all depicted within the narrative. The second you give a token character other qualities, then they're human—they cease being tokens because they are fully realized.

You've both just triumphed in industries notoriously difficult for people of color to really succeed in. What is your advice to the next generation?
HAN: Follow your passions, and tell the stories that you want to tell. If the passion is there, and creativity, then the audience will find it. I think one of the challenges of being a creator of color [is] that everything ends up being about your minority status in a way. But I think you want to be at a point where you're just talking about the craft and the art and the stories.
WU: Really make sure you nurture the things that don't have to do with business … your connections to art, to nature, to poetry; the things that actually feed your soul. That's the well from which your work springs. If that well is dry, the work starts to suffer. At the end of the day, the reason when we were kids that we were moved by a book or a movie was because it came from that place in someone's heart. Forget about hustling, and just do the things that really warm your heart.

With reporting by JENNA CALDWELL *and* SIMMONE SHAH

Senator Mazie Hirono on showing up, taking risks and persevering in politics

Watching President Biden sign the COVID-19 Hate Crimes bill into law on May 20 was a momentous day for the AAPI community. We were very happy, but also know full well that a law does not change the hearts and minds of those who bear animus toward the AAPI community. There's more work to be done.

Discrimination against our community and other marginalized groups has never been far below the surface, from the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 to the internment of 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II to the travel ban targeting Muslims. During the pandemic, we have seen a huge rise in hate crimes against AAPI [people]. That's why it was so important for the Senate and the House to say: We stand with you; we see you. That meant a lot to a community that has felt like we're invisible, always other, always foreign.

The root causes lie in a lack of understanding. Our education system should tell the stories of discrimination and racism in our country—and they should not be marginalized off to the side as electives. They should be very much a part of our nation's history, so that we have a better understanding of what has happened and is happening.

WE ALL NEED to be speaking up. There has been a rise in anti-Semitic hate crimes; when one of our groups is attacked, it is an attack on all of us. I certainly will continue to use my platform to speak out against these kinds of hatred.

It's been a journey to do that. In my culture—both in Hawaii and my Asian culture—being vocal, confrontational, aggressive is not viewed as a positive, especially coming from a woman. But the story of my mother and her heart of fire—some of which I hope I got—is one of perseverance and risk taking.

I've incorporated her lessons in the years that I've been in politics. The first is that we each can make a difference; certainly my mom changed my life by bringing me to this country. The second is to show up, which is half the battle—not just physically showing up, but staying the course and being very determined. And the third is to take risks. If we stay in our comfort zone, then change doesn't happen within our own selves, or the changes that our country needs. Although my mother passed recently, she continues to be a driving force in all I do in the political arena.

When one of our groups is attacked, it is an attack on all of us

Particularly during the Trump years, I really came to the recognition that I needed to speak out. He's a bully, and it's really important for us to stand up against bullies. And so I began to use my voice. It's not that I *found* my voice. We all have voices. We just need to use them.

I was never necessarily a quiet, retiring person—you don't run for office by being that way. But I became comfortable with using my voice to be very critical of what was happening in our country. There's a huge discomfort when women show their anger, but we should be able to express it in ways that are forceful and true.

That's what we all should be doing: using our hearts, our brains and our voices.

—As told to *Naina Bajekal,* with reporting by *Alana Abramson*



U.S. Senator Mazie Hirono (D., Hawaii)

GETTY IMAGES

Turning grassroots activism into long-term change

Community leaders, policy experts and civil rights campaigners spoke with TIME staff writer Cady Lang



JOHN C. YANG

President and executive director, Asian Americans Advancing Justice

"Let's be clear, we can't legislate away racism; we can't legislate away bigotry … We need to think about the community solutions. What is it that we can do to address racism, because a lot of this can't be on the policy level. It really has to be done on a community level, through hard conversations."

"If you think about what the 'model minority' myth is all about … it's used to divide us against other communities of color. So part of solidarity has to be understanding how all of these different structures work potentially to operate against us, [and] deconstructing these structures."



TAVAE SAMUELU

Executive director, Empowering Pacific Islander Communities

"We know that oftentimes when [the term] *AAPI* is deployed that it doesn't always mean or include Pacific Islanders … For many Pacific Islanders, it's been a site of erasure."

"I'm very clear about how deeply our liberation and our freedoms are tied up with each other … And so how do we sit with and really contend with the fact that racism shows up differently in our communities, and the ways in which we address that? [They have] to be specific, they have to be tailored, and they have to be really willing to sit in the difficulty and complexity and nuance of those intersections."



LAKSHMI SRIDARAN

Executive director, South Asian Americans Leading Together

"It's really important not just to examine and critique this current wave of violence, but also really understand [the] history … and to really see that there are common root causes."

"If we trace it back, it's always going to point to imperialism, capitalism, exploitation and really the actions of the state, [of] our government. That's really what leads to the interpersonal violence that often gets the most attention."

I'm done trying to make you see my humanity

By Nicole Chung

AS WE CONTINUE TO WITNESS VIOLENCE AGAINST ASIAN Americans—including, in the past month, the punching of a Bay Area father pushing his baby in a stroller; the assault on two women with a cement block in a Baltimore liquor store; and the stabbing of two women, ages 85 and 65, at a bus stop in San Francisco—my social media feeds are frequently filled with messages imploring people to recognize and challenge anti-Asian racism.

It's clear why, as many are apparently unaware. A recent survey found that 37% of white Americans had not even heard about the spike in attacks on Asian Americans (with 42% of respondents unable to name a single prominent Asian American). Another survey revealed that Asian women were targeted in 65% of incidents in which the victim's gender was reported, and when demographic information was available, a majority of perpetrators were reported to be white and male. The recent wave of harassment and violence is just one manifestation of a deep-rooted anti-Asian prejudice in this country, which cannot be understood solely in terms of individual incidents, or without acknowledging that it is inextricably bound up with America's long legacy of racial oppression built on anti-Blackness. But while discrimination faced by Asian and Pacific Islander people—especially those more vulnerable because of poverty, immigration status, occupation, age, isolation or other circumstances—is far from new, sometimes it can feel as though we are begging others to see it, see us, at all.

I am tired of being asked to think about racism from the perspective of those least impacted by it

Over the past year, I have often found myself urging family, friends, acquaintances and strangers to first notice and then feel outraged by the ways in which Asian and Pacific Islander Americans are being endangered by pandemic scapegoating, from children being tormented at school to elders being attacked in the streets. As a Korean adoptee raised in a white family, I've also spent years attempting to translate and explain my own experience—including the bigotry and racialized misogyny I regularly encounter as an East Asian American woman—to many of the people who love me most. I understand and have joined in calls to action, appeals to would-be allies; I've been frustrated by white silence. None of us should be unwilling to name or condemn racist violence.

But as the attacks continue, I find that I am increasingly weary of pleading for acknowledgment or empathy. I am ready to stop chasing after those who need to see your deepest wounds on display before they will even contemplate believing your words. I've lost the energy or desire to educate or provide reasoned, patient answers to anyone who still needs to be convinced that Asian people face discrimination and violence in this country. Even the week of the Atlanta-area spa shootings



that left eight people—six of them Asian women—dead, I received many versions of the question: What would you say to white people in this moment, to help them understand how serious this is?

What *can* I say to persuade this or that group of white people—white parents, white people with Asian relatives or friends or co-workers, white people who aren't "comfortable" talking about race or privilege—to start having these "important conversations" if they aren't already? Is it my responsibility to do so? Maybe, if I can, but the truth is that I am tired of being asked to think about racism from the perspective of those least impacted by it. I don't always feel like explaining anti-Asian prejudice to people who have never considered it before. I don't want to hear or validate confessions that someone hasn't thought enough, done enough, said enough, worked enough, read enough, challenged enough microaggressions at work or at school. I don't need an inbox full of emotional labor from white people just discovering the fact that Asians in America experience racism, and that I am Asian American. I *do* hope that more people read, learn and speak out, as we should all be doing, and I'm grateful to those who have more drive and capacity to teach right now. But there are days when I feel up to it and days when I don't, and lately the latter outnumber the former.

PERHAPS IT SHOULDN'T have taken me so long to realize that it isn't *always* my responsibility to engage with white people on this issue—whether that means cataloging the most recent horrific attacks in case someone is still unaware, providing examples of racism I've personally experienced in diverse and insular spaces alike, recommending articles and books for them to read, offering impromptu lessons on the Asian American history many of us weren't taught in school, or trying to put words to the heavy dread and fury I carry through each day now—all in an effort to persuade others to name and care about what is happening. Laying down this burden flies against an instinct first cultivated so I could cope with and try to close the empathy gap between me and the white family and friends who loved me but who could never quite see or grasp my reality as a Korean American woman. As a transracial adoptee, I was uniquely conditioned to excuse and instruct and even comfort the white people who adopted me, or hired me, or gave me a chance, or just seemed to tolerate my presence—I felt as though I should be the one to not just reach out, but stretch more than halfway to meet them. It was my duty, I long believed, to be a bridge—even if this sometimes required me to offer up my pain or trauma for others to walk over in pursuit of some elusive understanding.

Racism against Asian and Pacific Islander people in this country is long-standing. But perhaps I could permit myself to feel the full weight of my anger and weariness over it only when, after a year filled with so much grief and fear and the loss of several people I loved, I found myself buying safety whistles for me and my daughters. Now, as each week brings new reports of Asian elders being assaulted, Asian women being harassed, Asian children being bullied, I realize how little will I have to partake in discussions about racism that center and cater to whiteness: what white people don't know; what they're uncomfortable with; what they refuse to see or recognize or speak out against. There will always be those who doubt or deny the racism, othering and fetishization that dehumanizes us, the violence that threatens us. At what cost, I wonder, do I continue to exhaust my own finite resources running after them, hoping to reach them? Have I not lost enough precious time and energy to white supremacy?

The conversations I most want to have right now are ones that focus on the people we fight for

After the Atlanta shootings, when a fellow Korean American texted to ask how we might try to talk with, protect and support our families in the midst of our shared rage and grief, I realized that the conversations I most want to have right now are ones that focus not on the silent or the unconvinced, but on the people we fight for—our loved ones, our communities, our allies and those to whom we owe our solidarity. As I think about what I can do, how I can best help and hold space for those more vulnerable than myself, I've found the most meaningful support and comfort within the community I *do* have, and have had all along: the people who don't need to hear my pleas in order to see and value my humanity.

Chung is the author of All You Can Ever Know



A WAR WITHIN

THE CONFLICT IN GAZA ENDED. BUT ISRAEL IS STILL BROKEN

BY ORLY HALPERN/LOD, ISRAEL



Firefighters inspect a synagogue that was set on fire during violent clashes in the mixed Arab-Jewish city of Lod on May 14

PHOTOGRAPH BY OREN ZIV



Palestinian residents of Lod build defenses around the Great Mosque on May 12

I

IT'S THE SABBATH, AND DOZENS OF Jewish young men are strolling through a mostly Arab neighborhood wearing yarmulkes and white shirts, M-16s slung over their shoulders or pistols in their waistbands. They move as if this were a settlement in an Arab city in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories and they were the locals, even the landlords.

But the young men aren't locals, and this only feels like the West Bank. It's Lod, a mixed Arab-Jewish city around 15 miles from Tel Aviv, and the new front in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The two peoples have contested the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the river Jordan for a century. And on maps, each has its own area. But the reality on the ground is the 300 armed men afoot in Lod. They are Jewish settlers who rushed from the West Bank, interrupting their assertion of dominion on land in nominally Palestinian territory to reinforce Jewish residents of Lod intent on "settling" an Arab neighborhood within Israel proper.

"It's not a militia," insists Ari Elon, a tall, husky 24-year-old from Cleveland who immigrated to Israel, served in the Israeli army and lives in the West Bank settlement of Alon Shvut. Like the others here, Elon answered a call to his settlement's WhatsApp group for armed men to go to Lod to protect the homes of scared members of an ideological Jewish nationalist religious community called Lod Garin Torani (Lod Torah Seed). The city had been in turmoil after Arab youths began rioting a few days earlier.

The volunteers gather in what they call the War Room, located in the midst of the mostly Arab neighborhood of Ramat Eshkol, where a growing number of Garin families now live, welcome or not. Their reinforcements from the West Bank, all with military experience, pore over maps of the neighborhoods and take calls from foot patrols and Jewish residents. A whiteboard lists neighborhoods and the number of armed volunteers each has posted to it. The floor is strewn with helmets and armored vests.

In terms of deaths, damage and international attention, the events in Lod were overshadowed by what unfolded in the Gaza Strip a week later. The militant group Hamas fired rockets from its coastal enclave into Israel, killing a dozen people. The Israeli air force responded with airstrikes that left at least 248 dead. For the international community, it was the focal point for an urgent round of diplomacy to deliver the cease-fire that halted the conflict on May 21.

But for Israel, a war with Gaza is containable and finite. What Jewish and Arab Israelis heard exploding in their neighborhoods was something new. In Acre, and in other mixed cities where Arabs and Jews live side by side, neighbors turned on each other.

NOW ISRAELIS FEAR the crumbling of a coexistence that for seven decades has allowed the country's Jewish majority to live in peace beside the 20% of the population who, if their homes were in the West Bank or Gaza, would be called Palestinian. Many actually prefer that to "Israeli Arab," which implies a compatibility that, in any event, is no long assumed. And nowhere is the deterioration more visible, and potentially more combustible, than in Lod.

Reported by Leslie Dickstein, Mariah Espada and Madeline Roache

PREVIOUS SPREAD: DPA/PICTURE ALLIANCE/GETTY IMAGES; ABOVE: LAURENT VAN DER STOCKT—GETTY IMAGES



On May 10, Israeli police stormed al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem, escalating their confrontations with Arab Israelis during the holy month of Ramadan. As the news filtered out, Muslim Israeli Arabs in Lod planned a demonstration in front of the city's al-Omari Mosque, known as the Great Mosque.

Musti, a 24-year-old Arab who feared giving his full name, says he was there that night. "The police gave us permission," he says, but when the group began demonstrating, "[they] were waiting for us with helmets and weapons." They started shooting stun grenades at protesters, and the crowd responded with stones and burning tires.

"From this point on, there was no control," says Sheik Yusuf Albaz, the imam of the Great Mosque. Youths set dumpsters on fire and threw rocks. But the situation

VIEWPOINT

ISRAELIS CAN'T GO BACK TO HOW WE WERE BEFORE

BY AYELET GUNDAR-GOSHEN

THE FIRST MISSILE ATTACK from Gaza on Tel Aviv began at around 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 11. The teenage patients at the Geha Mental Health Hospital were just getting ready for bed when the alarms started. For most of them, this came as a complete surprise. For kids struggling with the mental-health conflicts that led to their hospitalization, the national political conflicts remained vague. None of them were aware of the tear gas and stun grenades shot by Israeli forces into al-Aqsa Mosque early on May 10, injuring 300 people. But when the sirens started and the sky filled with echoes of explosions, it was clear even to the patients that something was going on. Anxiety levels began to soar. Soon after, parents started calling the ward, concerned about their children, asking, "Is the hospital safe?"

Safer than outside. Beyond the walls of the mental-health hospital, Israel was deteriorating into chaos. While Hamas was firing from the other side of the border, inside the country, violence was spreading. Arab citizens of Israel attacked Jewish citizens. Jews attacked Arabs. Innocent people were beaten. Windows were broken. Cars were set on fire, and the smoke carried the smell of a civil war.

Similar events have unfolded before in Israel. But not like this. Not on this scale. As the fighting between Israel and Gaza continued, Israel was bleeding from within. "Who seeds wind shall harvest the storm," says the biblical phrase, and in the case of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the storm came right on time. After Bibi's years of sowing the seeds of hate and polarization, the riots occurred at a crucial moment for his political survival.

After four consecutive failures to win elections, the opposition was closer than ever to forming a government. For the first time, right-wing leaders were willing to negotiate with a Muslim party, in an attempt to form a wide anti-Bibi coalition. At last, realpolitik cooperation between Arabs and right-wing leaders seemed possible. But as the conflict erupted, negotiations collapsed. As a result, Netanyahu's chances to extend his hold on power have improved dramatically. The current round of violence suited Hamas' interests as well; it allowed the fundamentalist party to present itself as the defender of al-Aqsa, gaining support over its domestic rival, Fatah. After the cease-fire was agreed on, both parties were able to declare victory. As usual.

Elsewhere, there is a sense of loss; many Jewish citizens of Israel are mourning our vanished coexistence with our Arab neighbors. But for many Arab citizens of the country, this was already an imaginary coexistence. When middle-class Israelis say, "We interact a lot with Arabs," it usually means that we meet the Arab citizens who clean our houses as we go to work or serve us hummus as we dine at restaurants. As much as I cherish the solidarity between Arab and Jewish staff in my ward, I can't ignore the fact that all of the doctors and executives are Jews, while the cleaners and medical workers are mostly Arabs. Because of our traumatic history as a nation, many Jewish Israelis are blind to this; after years of being persecuted, the Jews have a strong sense of collective victimhood. The current violence reinforces this sense of victimhood.

But violence isn't only burning tires and rioting. Violence is also the variety of means taken by the Israeli government to control and exclude the Arab minority. For some of the Jewish majority, "restoring the peace" means that Jews will return to their comfortable lives while Arabs continue to suffer from poverty and discrimination. But before we return to our comfortable lives, we must look at the face of Sayed Musa, who nearly lost his life as he was beaten by Jews. We must look at the face of Avri Har-Even, whose hotel room was set on fire by Arab rioters in Acre. Anger, grief, the urge for revenge: we must be able to overcome these, if we ever want to establish true coexistence in this land.

Gundar-Goshen is an author and a clinical psychologist based in Tel Aviv

VIEWPOINT

A DOCTOR'S ACCOUNT OF LIFE UNDER BOMBARDMENT IN GAZA

BY SALAM KHASHAN

I GREW UP in the Gaza Strip in a small town called al-Qarara, and went to medical school in Cairo before returning home in 2016 to begin a family-medicine residency and work in hospitals and clinics. Now I'm in my final year.

Even before the latest round of Israeli airstrikes, Gaza's health care system was exhausted. We already had a shortage of basic medications, lab and blood-bank needs, as well as surgical equipment, which was only exacerbated by the airstrikes. Because Gaza City is so densely populated, COVID-19 has ravaged the population. Israel is not fulfilling its responsibility of vaccinating Palestinians, even though the U.N. says that under international law the Israelis must give us access to shots.

Then the war began. Gazans lived under continuous bombardment by Israeli airstrikes for 11 days. It was unsafe to leave your home, but even home didn't feel safe. Some of my nephews would scream when they heard a bomb land. One of them—7-year-old Tariq—would put his hands on his head and laugh hysterically. I know he was trying to hide his fears. His mother tried to calm him down and hug him. But the kids know. They know about Palestine, about Israeli occupation. We just tried to tell them it will end soon. With each bomb that fell, we would try to be stronger in front of them.

It was too dangerous for many doctors, including myself, and even patients to go to clinics and hospitals. It was extremely difficult to get medical aid across the Egyptian border, and it still is. Many patients with chronic illnesses like hypertension and diabetes were running out of their medications and would be risking their lives just by trying to get medication from clinics outside. We had to stop our telemedicine program because the Israeli airstrikes damaged the building where we operated. Damaged roads between hospitals made it harder to coordinate medical care. I felt paralyzed because I could not offer my patients the care that they deserved.

Israeli airstrikes killed Dr. Ayman Abu al-Ouf, one of Gaza's most senior doctors, who was known for his compassion. I can assure you that Dr. Abu al-Ouf was not a militant. He didn't have time to be. He was too busy with his patients and his students, until an airstrike destroyed his house in Gaza City, killing him along with multiple family members. We cannot just replace Dr. Abu al-Ouf. His medical experience was unparalleled.

We have international laws against the murder of civilians. The message Palestinians receive from the international community is that Israel is above these rules. We hear the U.S. say continually that Israel has the right to defend itself. But how, exactly? By killing children in Gaza? By doing ethnic cleansing in East Jerusalem?

When news of the cease-fire came, we were relieved that the nightmare had come to an end. There were a few hours of celebration. I wish I could have taken a few weeks off to relax and process these traumatic events, but I wasn't able to. I knew many patients would need my help. I spoke with them and just gave them space to explain how they felt during the airstrikes so we could unpack the anxiety, depression and grief. I tried to reframe the story to be lighter, not heavier.

I'm sure that for my patients with mental-health problems, their conditions have worsened since the airstrikes. Even those who previously did not struggle with their mental health surely will now. Depression and PTSD will be inevitable for many. They will need rehabilitation, as will doctors. I don't think we will be able to deal with the huge number of new psychological conditions. We just don't have the capacity.

Two days after the cease-fire began, we went to the beach: me, my sister and her children. Despite the fear and pain caused by these events, we still want to go out and have a good time and recover. We know it will not be easy. I think people here are really fighters, just to be able to keep on living. —*As told to Sanya Mansoor*



escalated sharply with the killing of Moussa Hassouneh, 32, a young Arab father of three, that night by members of the Garin, whom the Arabs call "settlers."

The Jewish men said they opened fire when Arabs threw stones at them. Hassouneh's father Malek said Moussa was not even involved. The police arrived and dispersed the crowd without arresting any Garin members. Hours later they arrested four Jews, all of whom said they acted in self-defense. Israel's Minister of Public Security called for their release, and they went home two days later.

"Sure, the Arabs threw stones," said Sheik Albaz. "But the stones are not the point. The point is that the youth don't believe in the country anymore. After 70 years, there's no faith in the state."

Across the country, the Arab riots were answered by anti-Arab Jewish



FATIMA SHBAIR—GETTY IMAGES

Recovery workers in Gaza search for survivors in the ruins of a building hit by an Israeli airstrike on May 16

extremists, including "volunteers" from settlement outposts. On WhatsApp, more than 100 groups formed to organize attacks on Arabs. One message told volunteers to bring "flags, bats, knives, guns, brass knuckles, wooden boards, pepper spray, anything that would hurt them. We will restore the honor of the Jewish people." Violence begot violence between mobs of Jews and Arabs in a spree of vandalism, stabbings and beatings in Lod, Acre, Haifa and elsewhere.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who for years has suggested that Israeli Arabs are a fifth column, now urged reconciliation. "Our goal is, first, to halt the violence," he said. "Afterwards, to rehabilitate the relations between Jews and Arabs. We live together in this state, and we need to get back on the track of coexistence, cooperation and partnership in the great success called 'the State of Israel.'"

THE TENSIONS WITHIN LOD have existed since the then-Arab city called Lydda fell to Jewish forces in the 1948 war that founded Israel. Most of the city's Arab population was expelled, and Jews moved in. When the city fell on hard times in the 1980s, the Arabs returned to housing tenements vacated by Jews. Then, about 20 years ago, the Garin members began buying apartments in those neighborhoods too. "The goal was to attract young religious couples to help the economic situation of the city," says Yoel Frankenburg, 34, who is part of the Garin.

Others see a different agenda. "They want to Judaize the area, show sovereignty and push the Arabs, the Arab culture and the Arab language out of Lod," says Amnon Be'eri-Sulitzeanu, co–executive director of the Abraham Initiatives, a nongovernmental organization in Lod that works to advance coexistence between Jews and Arabs. The Arabs of Lod, who make up about 30% of the city's residents, say Mayor Yair Revivo has prioritized services and facilities for Jews in Arab neighborhoods. In December, Revivo, a former campaign manager for Netanyahu, sparked an uproar by saying, "Violence is part of the Arab culture," and promising to deport families of criminals.

In a statement, the Lod municipality said that under Revivo, $100 million has been spent to improve the lives of the Arab sector and that the mayor works hard to strengthen coexistence.

But Arabs point to the reality of their lives in Israel: they are just over 20% of the population and about half of the poorest municipalities. Netanyahu's government passed a law in 2018 that removed Arabic as an official language and gave Jews an "exclusive right to national self-determination." In 2019, the Prime Minister wrote on Instagram that "Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people—and only it." "What we see in Lod is what we see in Israel," says Be'eri-Sulitzeanu, "but much more extreme because the disparities are greater and the municipality's support for the [Garin] is much more."

If peaceful coexistence in Lod was an illusion before, it is shattered now. Sporadic attacks on Arabs and Jews continued in late May. At the centuries-old Great Mosque, Muslims slept inside at night to protect it. The Jewish paramilitary operated its War Room with 10 armed volunteers on a rapid-response team and 20 more stationed on rooftop lookouts around Ramat Eshkol. Across town, Esther Ochigava, a secular Jewish resident, went to visit her Arab neighbor when he came home injured after being beaten by Jews. "I apologized to him," she says. But the situation has changed: "At traffic lights, I never looked at who's in the car next to me, but now I do." ◻

VIEWPOINT

THE U.S. HAS FEW OPTIONS TO BRING PEACE

BY IAN BREMMER

MORE THAN 250 PEOPLE LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE LATEST round of violence between Israel and Hamas, many of them civilian men, women and children. The overwhelming majority of the dead, including Hamas militants, were killed by Israeli airstrikes in Gaza. Behind-the-scenes diplomacy from the Biden Administration and the willingness of Egypt's government to mediate played some role, but the bloodshed ended only when Israel and Hamas each felt they could claim victory. Absolutely nothing has changed. That's why it's going to happen again, and when it does, there will still be all the same limits on the ability of outsiders to stop the killing.

Even after the cease-fire, there is no greater hope for a broader settlement of hostilities between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel's geopolitical position has never been stronger, thanks in part to the Trump Administration's brokering of the so-called Abraham Accords between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and a few other Arab governments. As they did during this round of hostilities, these countries will criticize Israeli actions, but they won't walk away from potentially profitable ties with Israel to help Palestinians. Though Saudi leaders have yet to cut a deal with Israel, they share a common foe in Iran, which worries both governments far more than the situation of the Palestinians.



Prime Minister Netanyahu and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrap up a joint press conference in Jerusalem on May 25

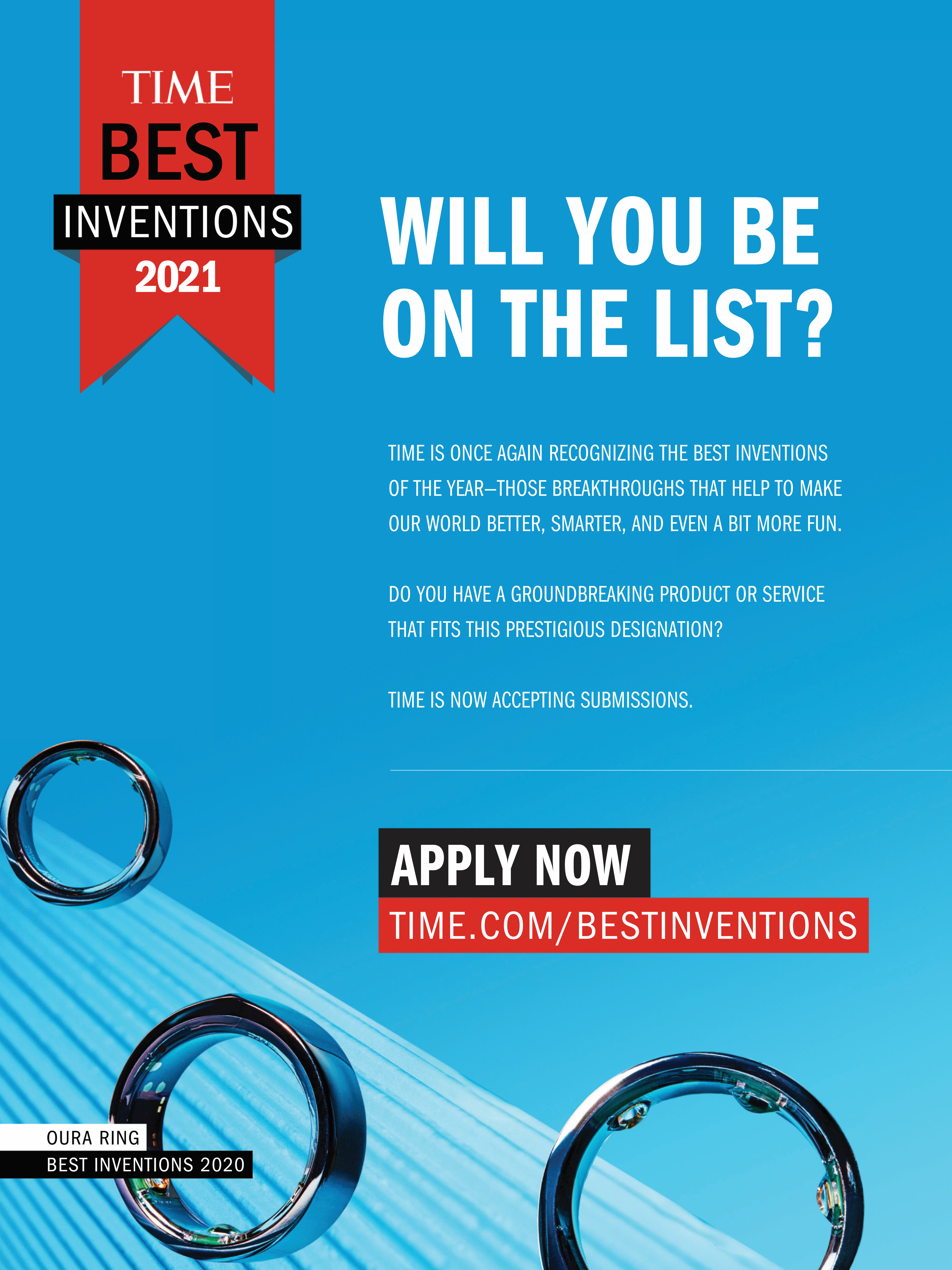
Criticism of the latest round of retaliatory strikes in Gaza will continue from all sides, including Europe, but no one will coerce the Israeli government to change its approach to the Palestinians. The Palestinian leadership remains deeply divided. The decision by the Palestinian Authority to cancel a recent election that Hamas would likely have won leaves Israel conveniently without a negotiating partner that can credibly speak for all Palestinians. The Biden Administration understands all this, and with a limited amount of time to advance his agenda through Congress before U.S. midterm elections in November 2022 that might cost Democrats their majority in one or both houses, the President isn't looking to launch complex peace initiatives that will very likely come to nothing.

The next time Israel and Hamas start shooting at each other, Joe Biden or a future U.S. President won't have any more leverage than Biden had this time. As Hamas fired missiles toward civilian populations in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and other parts of Israel, no one could persuade Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to stop his military from pounding Hamas targets in Gaza. There are issues on which U.S. Presidents can pressure Israeli leaders to change tack, but that's much harder to accomplish when the entire Israeli political establishment is united behind actions in defense of national security, as it was in this case. A poll from the first few days of the conflict found that 72% of Israelis opposed a cease-fire until significant damage had been inflicted on Hamas and its ability to fire rockets. Biden resisted calls to demand a cease-fire for as long as he could, because he knew U.S. prestige and his personal credibility would take a hit when his calls were ignored. There's no reason to believe the dynamic will be different next time.

THE U.S. SENDS ISRAEL \$3.3 billion in military aid each year as part of a 2016 agreement between Israel and the Obama Administration. In October 2019, during the early months of his campaign for President, Biden said, "The idea that we would draw military assistance from Israel on the condition that they change a specific policy I find to be absolutely outrageous." To back away from such a pledge as Hamas fired rockets at Israeli cities would have been unthinkable, and there's no evidence that Biden would consider such an option. Nor is there any sign that Congress would support a pressure campaign, even if Biden wanted one. Despite calls from some progressive Democrats to halt support for Israel without changes in Israeli policy, three-quarters of the members of the U.S. House signed a letter in April that pledged the U.S. would not impose any conditions on aid to Israel.

All that's changed here is the level of frustration among Israelis, desperation among Palestinians and the willingness of Hamas to fire rockets deeper into the heart of Israel. And the clock is now ticking on the next Israeli-Palestinian confrontation. ◻

ALEX BRANDON—POOL/AP


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Politics

THE EVOLUTION OF ELISE STEFANIK

How a moderate Republican became a MAGA warrior

BY CHARLOTTE ALTER

WHEN ELISE STEFANIK WAS ELECTED TO THE HOUSE OF Representatives in 2014, she was hailed as the fresh face of the new GOP. Stefanik had run for office in her late 20s, determined to modernize the Republican Party to attract more women and appeal to her fellow millennials. In her victory speech, she praised her opponents for their good-faith participation in the miracle of American democracy. "No matter their party, our democratic process is strengthened by those individuals willing to put forth their ideas," she said on the night she set a record as the youngest woman ever elected to Congress.

Today, Stefanik is still a politician on the rise, but for very different reasons. Her colleagues elected her House GOP conference chair on May 14, making her the highest-ranking Republican woman in Congress. And she got there by lashing herself to a cause that undermines the same democratic process she once hoped to strengthen.

Stefanik replaced Representative Liz Cheney, who made herself a GOP outcast by insisting the party stop parroting President Donald Trump's lies about the 2020 election being stolen. Replacing Cheney with Stefanik sent a powerful signal: that anyone who defies Trump's conspiracy theories cannot carry the Republican mantle.

But Elise Stefanik was not always a Trump acolyte. Not long ago, she was a rising star known for her embrace of facts, her trust in science and her push to build a more diverse party, highlighted by her efforts to recruit more GOP women to run for office. She was a prominent member of the moderate Tuesday



PHOTOGRAPH BY SAMUEL CORUM



Stefanik speaks to the media on May 14 after her election as House GOP conference chair

Group, and she was widely credited for a bipartisan spirit—"every Democrat's favorite Republican," as one former GOP leadership aide puts it.

Yet as Trump redefined the GOP, Stefanik transformed as well. Her metamorphosis has made her a fundraising star and a party leader. It's also dismayed many Republicans who have worked with and admired her in the past. "To be a handmaiden of Trump and get a little pat on the head from Trump is not a leadership move," says former Republican Congresswoman Barbara Comstock, who worked closely with Stefanik and helped organize a small, bipartisan shower in her honor ahead of her 2017 wedding. "It's embarrassing. It's sad."

So how did Elise Stefanik go from praising the democratic process to voting to object to the Electoral College results? How did she go from criticizing Trump to feeding vague conspiracy theories about Hunter Biden on Stephen Bannon's podcast? What happened to Elise Stefanik?

Stefanik's office declined to make her available to comment for this story. But interviews with former colleagues, aides, friends, classmates and mentors, plus others I conducted with Stefanik in 2018 and 2019 for my book, *The Ones We've Been Waiting For,* paint a portrait of a politician whose embrace of Trump has puzzled former allies and mentors. "Elise could have been the face of a new generation of Republicans that could represent a real big-tent party," says Margaret Hoover, a center-right commentator who worked with her in the Bush White House. "It shows that she was never motivated by principles, and that's deeply disappointing."

IF YOU ASK Stefanik's childhood classmates what she was like as a girl, two words keep coming up: *integrity* and *ambition*. Growing up in upstate New York, Stefanik was friendly with Melissa DeRosa, now an embattled senior aide to scandal-plagued Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo. As middle schoolers in student government at the Albany Academy for Girls, they teamed up to pressure administrators to install a snack machine.

DeRosa grew into one of New York's most powerful Democratic operatives as Stefanik climbed the GOP ladder. But despite their political differences, they remained close. DeRosa was one of a handful of old classmates at Stefanik's wedding. When I interviewed her about Stefanik two years ago, DeRosa told me the old friends would frequently commiserate about the rough-and-tumble world of New York politics. "She is so morally supportive," DeRosa recalled.

But from the impeachment in 2019 through the insurrection in 2021, their relationship deteriorated to mutual loathing. By February, as DeRosa took heat for the Cuomo Administration's alleged effort to obscure the number of nursing-home deaths from COVID-19 in New York, Stefanik was going nuclear. On one occasion, she tweeted that the scandal enmeshing her friend of 20 years was a "criminal coverup." On another, she linked to a story about Cuomo's senior aides, adding, "PROSECUTE NOW!"

"She sort of threw Melissa under the bus," says Caroline Mason, the former headmistress at Albany Academy for Girls, who kept in touch with Stefanik for years after she graduated, exchanged Christmas cards with her until last year and even helped preside over her wedding ceremony. Mason had long admired Stefanik, but "something stronger took hold of her," she says. "She basically abandoned her own core values for a man who had no core values."

After high school, Stefanik went to Harvard, becoming the first in her immediate family to earn a college degree. She was one of few conservative women at Harvard's Institute of Politics, but fellow campus politicos told me they admired her sharp reasoning, intellectual integrity and willingness to stick to her positions, even when they were unpopular on a liberal-leaning campus. From there, Stefanik rocketed through the traditional Republican establishment. She worked in various roles in the George W. Bush White House, then as an adviser to vice-presidential nominee Paul Ryan during the 2012 campaign. After that defeat, the GOP released an autopsy that argued the party was struggling to reach young voters, women and voters of color. Stefanik saw it as an opening to help transform her party. With support from Ryan and deep-pocketed donors, she handily won her seat in New York's North Country.

'SHE'S MADE A CALCULATION THAT SHE CAN RISE TO POWER BY BACKING THE BIG LIE.'

—**Margaret Hoover,** political commentator



WHEN SHE ARRIVED on the Hill, Stefanik was part of a new cohort of Republicans focused on helping the GOP offer 21st century solutions to 21st century problems. She staked out moderate positions on climate change and immigration, and pushed the GOP to recruit more women. She also built a record of bipartisanship. Stefanik was the 31st most bipartisan member of Congress in her first term and the 19th in her second, per an index compiled by Georgetown's Lugar Center.

Stefanik tended to steer clear of hot-button issues, focusing instead on those that affected her district, like military



Stefanik with Trump during their visit to Fort Drum in August 2018

funding and support for rural farmers. She voted against Trump's 2017 tax cuts because she felt they penalized high-tax states like hers. In 2017, she introduced a House resolution to commit to addressing climate change, calling environmental stewardship a "conservative principle."

This record didn't make her popular with Republican hard-liners. But Stefanik was growing a reputation as a rising star. "She was the young, smart, vivacious millennial who could appeal to constituencies that Republicans had difficulty with," says a former GOP Congressman who worked closely with her. "She had that real up-and-coming thing."

WHEN TRUMP FIRST EMERGED as a political phenomenon, Stefanik mostly ignored him, keeping her criticism mild. But as Trump took over the party, her district changed with it, breaking heavily for Trump after voting for Barack Obama twice. "She's always been attuned to what her district wants," says Brendan Buck, a former top aide to Speaker Ryan. "A swing purple district got a middle-of-the-road moderate member, and now it is a Trumpy district, and they have a Trumpy Representative."

In August 2018, Trump joined Stefanik for a visit to Fort Drum, a key military base in her district. The large crowd highlighted the President's popularity with her constituents. A few months later, in the 2018 midterms, many Republicans who had criticized Trump lost their seats. Stefanik won her district by 14 points.

Democrats' attacks on Trump only drove her deeper into his corner. Stefanik sat on the Intelligence Committee during the inquiry into Russian interference in the 2016 election. While special counsel Robert Mueller found evidence of bad behavior by Trump and others—including testimony showing Trump had obstructed justice—the Intelligence Committee, and later the Department of Justice inspector general, found evidence of inappropriate investigative measures by the FBI and others. Over the course of the Russia probe, Stefanik became an outspoken Trump defender. "The longer she served on Intelligence, the more she pivoted toward defending the Administration," says a former GOP member of Congress.

During Trump's 2019 impeachment trial, Stefanik was named a member of his defense team and emerged as a vehement advocate. "She became a darling of the right and an enemy of the left," says the former GOP Congressman who knew her well. "And she just decided to own that and monetized it." In the last three months of 2019, Stefanik raised a whopping $3.2 million, the second highest haul in the House.

Stefanik soon became co-chair of Trump's re-election campaign in New York. At the 2020 GOP convention, she gave a rousing speech that called the Democrats' attacks on Trump "an attack on you: your voice, and your vote."

In the aftermath of Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election, Stefanik stopped short of adopting Trump's false claims that the election was "rigged" or "stolen." But she perpetuated baseless claims around the election outcome. She parroted conspiracy theories about "irregularities" and was one of 126 Republicans who signed on to an amicus brief in December asking the Supreme Court to consider rejecting election results in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Georgia and Wisconsin. Amid the insurrection, Stefanik voted to certify Biden's win in Arizona but reject his win in Pennsylvania.

Some people who know Stefanik believe she may have cultivated genuine concerns about election integrity, given that votes were cast under extraordinary circumstances and the race was extremely close in some states. On Bannon's podcast, Stefanik said she was concerned about "unelected judges and bureaucrats who were rewriting election laws in real time," and raised questions about a "lack of chain of custody" for ballots.

Others see it differently. "She's made a calculation that she can rise to power by backing the Big Lie," says Hoover.

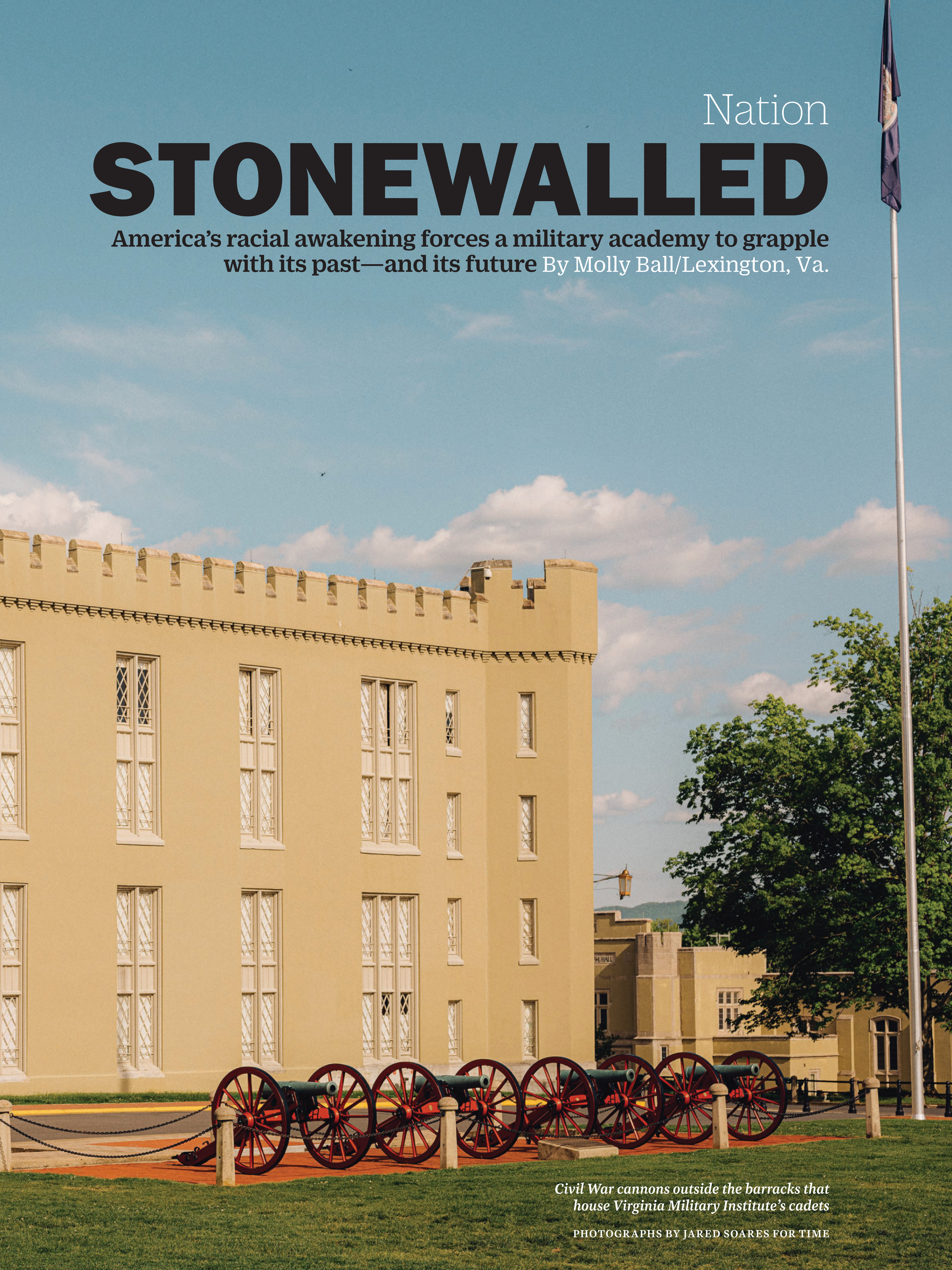
Stefanik may still be the face of the GOP's future, but that future looks a lot different than anyone thought. ◻

PREVIOUS PAGES: GETTY IMAGES; ABOVE: HANS PENNINK—AP


STONEWALL JACKSON

STONEWALLED

America's racial awakening forces a military academy to grapple with its past—and its future By Molly Ball/Lexington, Va.



Civil War cannons outside the barracks that house Virginia Military Institute's cadets

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JARED SOARES FOR TIME

I

IT WAS A COLD MORNING LAST DECEMber when they finally took Stonewall Jackson down. No ceremony was held, no protesters gathered; snowflakes swirled in the air. A crane silently hoisted the enormous bronze Confederate general from his perch of 108 years.

To many graduates of the Virginia Military Institute, that was no way to treat a hero. In a Facebook group for the "VMI Spirit," alumni mourned the "erasing" of their cherished history. One called it "ethnic cleansing." Several vowed to write the school out of their wills. "Shame on you low-life PsOS that were involved in this decision," another man wrote. "May you be haunted nightly, by the Sons and Daughters of Virginia that fought and lost their lives in the War between the States."

The statue's removal ended a saga that divided the state-sponsored military academy in Lexington, Va., whose graduates include a recent Army secretary, the governor of Virginia, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, a civil rights hero and the late actor Fred Willard. For a small group of VMI alums who had been pushing for change at the 181-year-old school, it was a victory—but only a first step.

The four activists, men in their 40s, had all once considered themselves conservatives. A Marine officer, a corporate lawyer, a civil engineer and a former Fox News correspondent, they treasured their unorthodox college experience, from the intentionally dehumanizing freshman "ratline" to the nearly two centuries of military history. But the events of recent years had awakened them, like many Americans, to the injustice all around them, and they had come to see the school's continuing veneration of its Confederate past as an embarrassing stain. In the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, removing the statue, they believed, was necessary but not sufficient to root out the racism plaguing their alma mater.

Many of their fellow grads did not agree. The ensuing controversy toppled the school's leadership and imperiled its funding. An independent investigation, ordered by the state, is probing the racial climate on campus after reports of racist behavior, from lynching threats to the disproportionate disciplining of Black students. And the institutional resistance the change agents faced radicalized them.

Their fight is a parable for our times. Recent years have seen a rapid, massive shift in America's collective racial consciousness. At the height of last summer's Black Lives Matter protests, one poll found the proportion of Americans who see racism as a "big problem" had surged to 76%, a 25-point increase in five years. It is the most profound shift in racial attitudes in a generation or more.

The change is likely just beginning. So is the backlash. Conservative politicians and right-wing media are decrying "cancel culture." States are pursuing bans on "critical race theory" at public schools. *Wokeness*—a term that originated in the Black community and has become a touchstone for advocates and critics alike—is now the central axis of American political controversy.

Thrown by the cultural upheaval, institutions like the military, corporations and professional sports teams are trying to find their footing. What feels to liberals like an overdue breakthrough strikes conservatives as a sudden personal attack. And as our still contested history shows, fights like the one at VMI will reverberate into the decades to come.

THE JACKSON STATUE occupied a central position in front of the hulking, Gothic barracks that house VMI's 1,700 undergraduate "cadets." The freshman "rats" were long required to salute it as they left the barracks through a stone arch bearing the general's name. VMI says it dropped the saluting requirement in 2015, years before the statue came down. But this isn't really true, I found: three recent graduates told me rats still had to salute in Jackson's direction as recently as last year. The rulebook was merely changed to specify the salute be directed at the flag visible over the statue's shoulder, something Black cadets had informally done for decades.

Today, no plaque marks the spot from which Jackson was yanked. All that remains is a flat patch of red bricks.



Jackson, who is believed to have enslaved six people, taught physics at the institute for 10 years before joining the rebellion in 1861. He was not much of a professor, according to official histories: humorless and a poor communicator, he was the target of student pranks. In 1863, after leading the Confederate army in numerous major battles, Jackson died following a friendly-fire incident. He was buried less than a mile from VMI's campus.

Founded in 1839 to guard the state arsenal, VMI sent thousands of students and graduates to fight for the Confederacy. In May 1864, 257 cadets, some as young as 15, marched 80 miles to the Battle of New Market, Va., in what is believed to be the



only time in U.S. history a college's student body has fought as a combat unit. Forty-five were wounded and 10 died.

Despite his undistinguished academic career, Jackson's legacy has long pervaded the campus, known at VMI as "post." Since the 1950s, a quote attributed to the general has been emblazoned on an interior archway as you enter VMI's barracks: "You may be whatever you resolve to be." The maxim, a favorite of Jackson's, was apparently drawn from a reverend's book of sayings the general carried. And Shah Rahman took the instruction to heart.

From the day he arrived at VMI in the fall of 1993, Rahman imbibed the institute's mythology. His reasons for attending were unorthodox: as a child in Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, where his parents had moved from their native Bangladesh, he acquired a taste for military symbolism, and fell in love with a serialization of *Gone With the Wind* on Libyan TV. He had little idea what awaited him on post. Then the ratline began.

The ratline: six months of nonstop verbal abuse, sleep deprivation and physical exertion, at the end of which cadets, all male until 1997, would "break out" by crawling through a mud pit. (In earlier eras, they fought their way out.) A combination of hazing, military training and indoctrination, the ratline aims to break down young cadets as individuals so they can be built back up as a unit. Rats are required to maintain a painful position known as "straining," their chins on their throats. They can be singled out by upperclassmen and ordered to do push-ups or tasks. They recite the names of the slain New Market cadets and until recently reenacted their charge on the battlefield. Attrition is high, but those who survive are bonded as "brother rats" forever.

Major General Cedric Wins, class of 1985, was named superintendent in April, VMI's first Black officer to fill the slot

One day as Rahman hurried from the library to his room, a recent alumnus stopped him and told him to "get on your



VMI removed the 108-year-old Stonewall Jackson statue on Dec. 7, 2020

face." Then the man, whom Rahman had never seen before, barked, "Stop, rat, get up. Why are you in my country?" He proceeded to berate Rahman, mocking his "Arab" ethnicity and Muslim faith. "My spirit was broken in that moment, realizing I'm being subjected to this for the color of my skin—punished for not being white," Rahman told me, choking up. "Back in my room, I broke down and cried. Other than that, I don't think I cried the entire time in ratline."

The ratline is supposed to be a great equalizer. But that experience and others like it—some so humiliating he still cannot talk about them—made Rahman feel singled out and isolated. White cadets also seemed to feel no compunction about using the *N* word to deride Black Americans in his presence. "You heard it several times a day," he says.

Rahman buried these experiences and redoubled his determination to succeed. As head cadet in the school's museum, he led visitors on tours of the Confederate history it contained, including an exhibit on the VMI cadets who guarded the gallows at the 1859 hanging of the radical abolitionist John Brown—an execution overseen by the school's founding superintendent, Francis Smith. When a Northern visitor insisted Brown was a hero, not a criminal, Rahman reacted with confusion and anger. Under his photo in the 1997 yearbook he had printed, "Inspired by Stonewall Jackson and General Patton, my boyish dreams came to life the day I matriculated at VMI."

It would be two decades before Rahman questioned what he'd been taught. In August 2017, right-wing activists gathered at a Confederate statue in Charlottesville, an hour's drive from VMI, to protest a push to remove it. Rahman's first reaction was to wonder what kind of person would want to tear down a likeness of the great Robert E. Lee. "Then you quickly realize, Wait a minute, these people are a bunch of white supremacists," he recalls. "I was so brainwashed I had never thought to question it. It never really occurred to me until that moment that these people we'd been taught to worship as heroes—they were scumbags and traitors, fighting their own country."

The following year, Rahman attended a VMI alumni fundraiser in Texas headlined by the school's superintendent, J.H. Binford "Binnie" Peay III, a retired four-star Army general. In the wake of Charlottesville, protesters were calling for the removal of Confederate iconography across the country. Some of the alumni at the fundraiser asked Peay, who is white, what would happen to the statues at VMI.

As Rahman recalls it, Peay became agitated. His face went red, and he balled one hand into a fist. The statues, he vowed, would never come down on his watch. (Through a school spokesman, Peay declined to comment.)

RAHMAN WAS NOT the only one reconsidering things he'd learned at VMI. The Jackson statue survived the post-Charlottesville furor, but it wasn't long before calls for change began anew. In June 2020, as protests over Floyd's murder spread, a recent graduate named Kaleb Tucker posted a Change.org petition calling for the school "to acknowledge the racism and black prejudice that still occurs at VMI." A good first step, wrote Tucker, who is Black, would be taking down the Jackson statue.

The petition drew hundreds of signatures, and stiff opposition. In a counter-petition titled "A Defense of the Stonewall Jackson Monument and VMI's Sacred Heritage," Jeremy Sanders, a white 2015 graduate, wrote that the school was "under attack" by "those who despise the very foundations of our beloved Institute." Jackson, he wrote, "was not a perfect man, however he must be judged through the context of his age." Yes,

STATUE: VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE; HEADSHOTS: COURTESY PHOTOS

Jackson owned slaves, but he taught them to read and write, Sanders noted. He wondered where it would end: Should George Washington's statue also be removed, or the New Market cadets' graves dug up? Sanders urged the school to repudiate the "slanderous" claims of racism. His petition drew more signatures in a day than Tucker's had in two weeks.

The school tried to show empathy. "I have struggled with ways to address you, this tragedy and senseless death of George Floyd in a meaningful way that is not just another lofty statement and one of platitudes," Peay wrote in a June 2020 letter to the community. VMI had always sought to balance tradition with needed change, he wrote, pointing to the admission of Black men in 1968 and women in 1997 as positive steps for the school.

What Peay didn't mention was that those evolutions weren't exactly voluntary. By the time VMI began admitting Black students, it was the last public college in Virginia to do so, and the federal government had threatened to withdraw funding. The institute also fought against admitting women, battling the Justice Department for seven years, all the way to the Supreme Court. The school's superintendent at the time, Josiah Bunting, called the 7-1 decision "a savage disappointment." An attempt to evade the requirement by converting the school from a public to a private institution failed by a single vote of VMI's board.

Donnie Hasseltine hoped this time might be different. A white Louisiana native and a classmate of Rahman's, Hasseltine spent 22 years in the Marine Corps, retiring in 2019 to work in cybersecurity in the Bay Area. Seeing the petitions flying back and forth, he sought to find a reasonable middle ground. In an open letter posted online, Hasseltine argued that whatever the intent of VMI's Confederate tributes, they now sent the wrong message. He suggested moving the Jackson statue and re-evaluating other monuments on post. "The question now," he wrote, "is whether we prefer to have change dictated to us or to choose our own destiny."

Two other alums on opposite coasts were thinking along similar lines. Mike Purdy, a Korean-American Navy veteran turned corporate lawyer in Northern Virginia, and Conor Powell, a journalist who had covered the war in Afghanistan for Fox News before settling in Los Angeles, were members of VMI's class of 1999. For half their time at the institute, it was all-male, and like most cadets they were convinced the school would be ruined if it let in women. But when the change came, they saw the school work to make it successful. Within a few years, the controversy was forgotten; the institute not only survived with its fundamental values intact but also embraced its female graduates. In a June 2020 op-ed in the Richmond *Times-Dispatch*, Purdy and Powell called on VMI to "lead from the front" by removing the Jackson statue.

Purdy, I should disclose, is an old friend of mine and the reason I became interested in this story. When I first knew him, two decades ago, he was a conservative graduate student who delighted in needling campus liberals in policy debates. Over the years, I watched his politics gradually shift. Like many college-educated Republicans, he grew disenchanted with the GOP and finally broke with it over Donald Trump. Now he uses phrases like *white privilege* and *systemic racism*—and it baffles and frustrates him that so many seem unwilling to take the same journey.

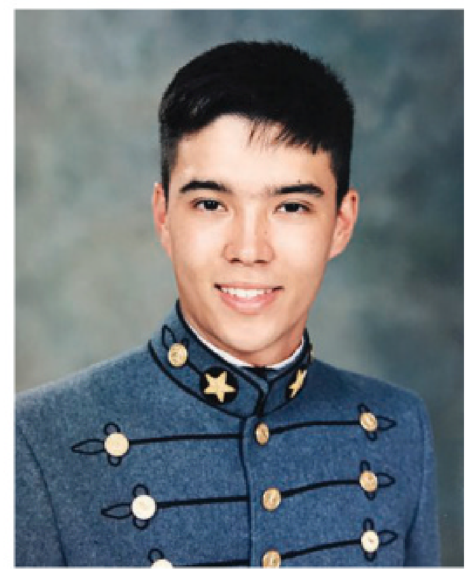
"It's been a slow evolution, but dealing with this VMI sh-t and Trumpism has turned me into a radical," he told me recently. "How can you listen to this equality, colorblindness, heritage, 'cancel culture' bullsh-t anymore without realizing what's really being said?"

Rahman and Hasseltine saw the op-ed, and reached out to Purdy and Powell. The four men strategized about how they might bring VMI's decisionmakers to their point of view. Powell was optimistic: he had known Peay since childhood and attended VMI with Peay's two sons. Powell knew the general as a good man, thoughtful and willing to listen.

"We write to you in the spirit of affection for the Institute, concern for its future, and a sincere desire to help VMI move forward in purposeful unity," the foursome's July 7 letter began. They proposed appointing a commission that would examine the campus' Confederate symbols and recommend a way forward.

The overture was rejected. "Unlike many communities who are grappling with icons of the past, VMI has direct ties to many of the historical figures that are the subject of the current unrest," Peay

BROTHER RATS









From top: Purdy, Powell, Rahman and Hasseltine pushed their alma mater to embrace change

announced weeks later. "Stonewall Jackson was a professor at VMI, a West Point graduate who served in combat in the Mexican War, a military genius, a staunch Christian, and yes, a Confederate General." The school would make changes to traditions like the New Market ceremony, he wrote, but would not remove any statues or rename any buildings.

This attitude struck the four men as shortsighted. "We tried to warn them: this fight is coming; there's no way to avoid it," Powell says. "They chose to ignore it." The efforts at persuasion had hit a wall, but they did not give up. "What's the first thing they teach you at VMI when you can't get something to budge?" Purdy says. "Double down, toughen up, outlast them."

AS VMI CLUNG to its past, the world around it had changed with disorienting speed. The Black Lives Matter movement took shape in the wake of the deaths of Trayvon Martin, in 2012, and Michael Brown, in 2014. The 2015 slaughter of nine Black churchgoers in Charleston prompted South Carolina to take down the Confederate flag that had long flown at its statehouse. President Trump's racial provocation thrust long-ignored divisions into the center of the political discourse.

The result has been a major change in Americans' racial attitudes, says Michael Tesler, a political scientist at UC Irvine. For two decades, from 1992 to 2012, polls registered little change on racial questions. But over the past decade, views on race have rapidly liberalized. For the first time, majorities believe that the police are more likely to brutalize Black Americans, that Black people face "a lot" of discrimination and that white people have an easier time getting ahead. Last year's protests accelerated the shift. Starting in June 2020, the percentage of Americans viewing Black Lives Matter favorably spiked, while the percentage viewing law enforcement favorably plummeted.

Some observers have dubbed this sudden and unprecedented shift "the great awokening." With the possible exception of the civil rights era, Tesler says, "there's never been this monumental and swift a change" since the invention of modern opinion polling. The transformation can be seen in every population group, including conservatives and people of color. But it is mostly being driven by white progressives, whose views on some racial questions are now more liberal than those of Black people.

The rapid shift has created tensions, including at VMI. Black cadets have reported a slew of disturbing incidents in recent years, including students wearing blackface and using the *N* word. In 2017, a group of white cadets dressed up as "Trump's Wall" for Halloween, with "graffiti" reading KEEP OUT and a slur for Latinos. The "wall" won the school costume contest, and the commandant of cadets, William Wanovich, posed for a grinning photo with it.

"Once Trump got into office, VMI became a different place," says Keniya Lee, a 2019 graduate who is Black. "People felt like they could do things, say things, tell certain people they don't belong." When a white business professor reminisced fondly about her ancestors in the Ku Klux Klan, Lee filed a complaint. The professor apologized, but said she believed Lee was being overly sensitive. Lee says she is still traumatized by her experience at VMI.

THE CONTROVERSY SHATTERED THE BOND OF RAT BROTHERHOOD

Some of the institute's most prominent and dedicated Black alumni told me they weren't shocked to hear racism exists at VMI today. What shocked them was that it was apparently tolerated. Refusing to ignore misconduct is a central part of the VMI creed. The school's honor code is cherished for its blunt simplicity: "A cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor tolerate those that do." A single violation results in expulsion, enforced by a cadet-run Honor Court.

Even in the early days of the school's racial integration, "we had leaders that never allowed things to get out of hand," says Glen Jones, a Black 1978 graduate who went on to serve on the VMI board and who has been heavily involved in the alumni community. "Were there racist acts, being called the *N* word, did those things happen? Yes, they did, just like they do in society. But what you had was oversight." In talking to younger Black cadets, Jones says, he was saddened to find many don't think that's the case today.

Gene Williams, class of 1974, told me that as a cadet, he felt safer on VMI's campus than he did off it. Yes, there were insults; yes, veneration of the Confederacy was everywhere. But he always felt equal to his white brother rats. Williams has devoted much of his adult life to the institute, serving 10 years on the board and establishing a campus summer program for at-risk youth. "At one point in time, it's clear VMI was systematically racist," he says—foreign students were admitted decades before Black Americans. Today, he doesn't believe there is systemic racism, but he believes the school's leaders were blinded by their unwillingness to think outside their own experience.

Last June, Williams wrote a long private letter to his friend Peay. The time had come, he wrote, "to be bold and not tinker at the margins." Taking pains to explain that his suggestions were offered in a constructive spirit by someone with a deep love for the institution, he proposed several concrete steps, including greater diversity in hiring, mandatory bias training, and "to make racism and sexism as unacceptable as dishonor." A reckoning was needed, he argued. "It is challenging even writing some of these words," he wrote, "and I know that it will be exponentially more difficult for many folks to read and even consider them."

Peay dismissed most of Williams' suggestions, and went on to issue his defiant letter insisting the Confederate statues would be kept. "Nobody can say they weren't told the perspective of people of color," Williams told me. "I respect and admire General Peay, but he's an 80-year-old white man. They just didn't go far enough, not because they're not good people, but because of a lack of perspective."

It was disillusioning for alumni like Williams and Jones. For decades, they had felt a deep bond with their brother rats. But when it mattered most, their brothers refused to believe their testimony.

LIKE WILLIAMS, THE FOURSOME of 1990s graduates—Hasseltine, Powell, Purdy and Rahman—had tried persuasion and failed. Next they went public.

Rahman got a Washington *Post* reporter, Ian Shapira, interested in the story. He urged Shapira to look beyond the hot-button issue of Confederate statues to the broader racial climate on post. On Oct. 17, a month after VMI's board voted to approve Peay's blueprint and keep the Jackson statue, Shapira's article detailing "relentless racism" at VMI appeared on the *Post*'s front page. It recounted a litany of troubling events, including a 2018 incident in which a white upperclassman threatened a Black freshman with lynching. The upperclassman was suspended rather than expelled; the freshman was later expelled for cheating, a charge he contended was concocted as retaliation. The article also detailed the steady stream of racial slurs cadets post on Jodel, an anonymous chat app.

Reaction was immediate. Democratic Governor Ralph Northam, VMI class of 1981, ordered an independent investigation into "the clear and appalling culture of ongoing structural racism" at VMI. The Democrat atop the state senate budget committee threatened to yank its $19 million in state funding if nothing changed.

Bill Boland, the president of VMI's board of visitors, issued a statement insisting "systemic racism does not exist here." The incidents described, he said, were isolated events that had been addressed. But within a week, Peay, who had been planning to retire at the end of the year, concluded the governor had lost confidence in him and resigned. A few days later, the board, fearing a broader crackdown, voted unanimously to remove the Jackson statue and set up committees to examine the school's racial climate and Confederate monuments. Two members resigned in protest before the meeting.

To many alumni, it all smacked of "cancel culture." A liberal mob, abetted by the news media, had manufactured phony grievances to force the school to succumb to the faddish tide of political correctness. It seemed especially rich coming from Northam, who in 2019 was discovered to have published a blackface photo in his 1984 medical-school yearbook. (He later denied he was in the photo and resisted calls to resign.) Peay, many argued, deserved the same due process Northam had demanded. "But instead of a fair inquiry, what you delivered was an accusatory, full-on cultural and political vendetta against your alma mater," wrote a 1967 alum and former board member, Carter Melton, in an open letter to the governor he paid to have printed in the *Times-Dispatch* as a full-page ad. (A spokeswoman for Northam said the governor was "concerned by the pace of progress," and noted that his letter was hardly the first time VMI had been called upon to change.)

The Republican state senate leader, Tommy Norment, a 1968 VMI grad, warned Northam not to "let the media lynch VMI." Purdy and his allies were threatened and called "quislings" and "traitors" on Facebook. White alums posted that the Civil War had nothing to do with slavery and that Stonewall Jackson was a hero. VMI's Black students, many commenters argued, were mostly athletic recruits who benefited from lower academic standards and didn't appreciate what made the school special. "Remove the black alumni, problem solved," one wrote.

There was no winning the argument for the minority cadets who sometimes spoke up to challenge these views. If they testified to their personal experiences, they were branded as "disgruntled" complainers; if they didn't, they were held up as proof that racism wasn't really prevalent. The controversy shattered the bond of rat brotherhood. The Peays, whom Powell once considered as close as family, no longer speak to him. In one online exchange, a classmate challenged Hasseltine's honor, a VMI taboo. Rahman says he would not feel safe setting foot on campus. "Donnie and I thought, our brother rats, they will never turn their backs on us," Rahman says. "That was not the case. I have never been so disappointed."

One group of conservative alumni has formed an unaffiliated political action committee, the Spirit of VMI, that plans to grade elected officials and run political ads. In a recent webinar for supporters, the group's leader, a 1985 graduate named Matt Daniel, explained its raison d'être: "We were heartbreakingly disappointed that an entire community, a family, people that we know and love and respect, were all labeled as racists—not just incidental racists but systemic racists," he said. (Daniel declined to be interviewed unless I agreed to answer a series of questions and commit to running his responses to my questions verbatim. Other alumni who have publicly opposed the changes under way at VMI also declined interview requests.)

Rather than fight, some turned defeatist. "If the wokes intend to knuckle VMI under, perhaps there is a greater question at stake here: is VMI worth saving?" a former state GOP executive director named Shaun Kenney wrote in a blog post titled "Maybe VMI Needs to Close on Our Terms." The alternative, conservatives fret, is a campus whose distinctive features have all been erased, smoothed into another snowflake-coddling bastion of censorious academic liberalism, where students spew social-justice jargon, invent new pronouns and accuse one another of "problematic" behavior.

They are right about one thing: the liberals have already won, and there is no going back. Stonewall Jackson's bronze body sits in storage at New Market, waiting to be resurrected in his new home overlooking the battlefield. In April, the school replaced Peay with its first Black superintendent, Cedric Wins, class of 1985. A search is under way for VMI's first chief diversity officer. At a public meeting in December, the board received a presentation from the state's chief diversity officer, Janice Underwood, who laid out the difference between "equality" and "equity" and explained why statements like "I don't see color" are not acceptable. Underwood urged the board members to "lean into discomfort" and suggested they pick up Robin DiAngelo's book *White Fragility.*

It has come to pass as Purdy and his allies predicted. The institute rejected the opportunity to change on its own terms; now it is at the mercy of liberal outsiders, dragged kicking and screaming toward what they consider progress.

THIS APRIL, on the 156th anniversary of Lee's surrender at Appomattox, the members of VMI's new Commemorations and Memorials Naming and Review Committee filed into an ornate room on campus, across the vast parade ground from the barracks. It was their first in-person meeting, and the first where they would consider the fate of Confederate symbols on post.

The school's line these days is that reports of racism on campus are overblown,

but that it is embracing change and welcomes the investigation, whose findings are set to be released on June 1. The committee had drawn up an inventory of 38 pieces of Confederate iconography, from the four Civil War cannons in front of the barracks to the gravestone marking the 1997 burial of the cremated remains of Jackson's horse. Now it was time to decide what to do with them.

"Since we began this process last fall, we have invited comment from the entire VMI alumni community and the public, and we have gotten it in spades," the committee's chairman, Richard Hines V, began. "It runs the gamut from 'pull out the eraser' to 'if you move anything, you are canceling the culture of VMI.'" An eloquent, bowtied trial lawyer whose first ancestor graduated from the institute in 1864, a century before he attended, Hines said the committee's mission was to create "an inviting and a neutral landscape."

A nuanced discussion of the interplay between past and present ensued. If Jackson was unfit to be honored with a statue, should his name also come off the arch behind it? Was there any way to "recontextualize" or move the 21-ft.-high painting of the New Market cadets charging into battle that greets visitors to Jackson Memorial Hall? Could the bronze statue of *Virginia Mourning Her Dead* be reoriented to honor all VMI's war dead, not just those who fought at New Market?

S. Waite Rawls III, a 1970 VMI grad and former president of the Museum of the Confederacy, argued the displays were sending the wrong message. A first-time visitor would likely be confronted with the massive battle mural, with the result that "the first message they get is, VMI's memorializing a bunch of damn Confederates," he said. But he also cautioned the committee against "erasing" history, and wondered if they could find a new way to recognize Jackson's military prowess, separate from the cause he fought for.

The threat of backlash hung over the discussion, as if the inertial force of collective nostalgia were itself a member of the committee. The alumni representative, Anthony Moore, a Black man, warned that donations could be imperiled. "If we go in and whitewash everything to do with the Confederacy, we're going to lose a lot of support," he said. "From the alumni perspective, the less we can change, the better."

Midway through the meeting, Wins, the institute's new superintendent, weighed in. A retired Army general with a quietly commanding air, Wins is regularly derided on alumni message boards as a Marxist and affirmative-action hire. In interviews, Wins told me that he didn't personally experience racism at VMI but that he believes the Black cadets who have complained and is committed to changing the school's atmosphere.

"In my time as a cadet, there was not a particular emphasis on Stonewall Jackson as a historical figure," Wins said. Jackson graduated from West Point, he noted, yet there are no tributes to him there. When Wins himself was a rat, a white cadet quietly advised him he could direct his salute at the flag instead of the Jackson statue. "Everything we did, from saluting to walking through the arch, was about tradition," Wins told the group. "I would ask, how much of this is about tradition, vs. history?"

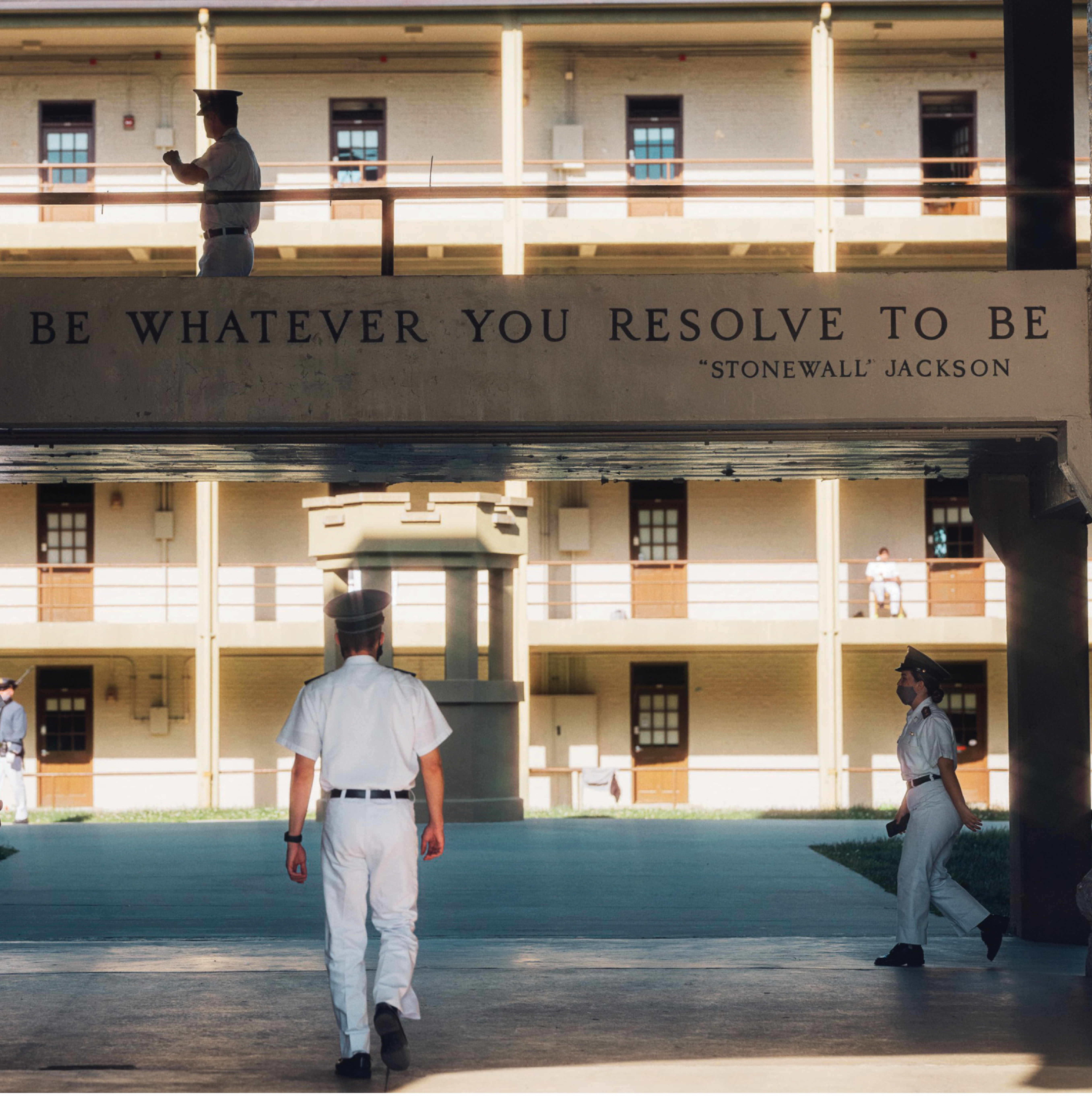
Over nearly six hours, committee members both white and Black referenced the ways their perspectives had changed over time. Lester Johnson Jr., a Black member of the institute's board, said he hadn't paid much attention to things like statues when he was a cadet, but his eyes had been opened to their significance. "Now, with what I'm learning, I really struggle," he said. "I just don't understand the veneration." For all the talk about the New Market cadets exemplifying valor and sacrifice, he said, as a Black man, he was never able to see them as anything but Confederate soldiers.



THE AWOKENING has been made up of millions of such tiny epiphanies: the history we weren't taught, the horrors we weren't meant to consider. In my conversations with dozens of VMI cadets, alumni, officials and parents, nearly every one described an evolving perspective on race in recent years. Like Shah Rahman, they'd formed their worldview and sallied confidently forth—until something came along to upend it. That is why the stakes of this fight are so high for all involved: myths like the Lost Cause can only survive if they are handed down from one generation to the next.

But progress is often divisive, and rarely comes without sacrifice. In 1965, a 26-year-old VMI graduate named Jonathan Daniels traveled to Alabama to join the cause of civil rights. A white New Hampshire native who was studying to be an Episcopal priest, Daniels had just been released from jail when he and two Black girls were confronted by a white man with a gun. The man pointed his shotgun at 17-year-old Ruby Sales. Daniels pushed her down, threw himself in front of the blast and was instantly killed.

The late Congressman and civil rights leader John Lewis later said it was Daniels' selflessness that inspired him to activism. Martin Luther King Jr. called it "one of the most heroic Christian deeds of which



I have heard in my entire ministry." Daniels has been sainted and designated as a martyr by the Episcopal Church. At VMI, there is an award named for him, as well as a courtyard on the back side of the barracks. They are recent additions, and easy to miss, unlike the Confederate icons that immediately greet visitors.

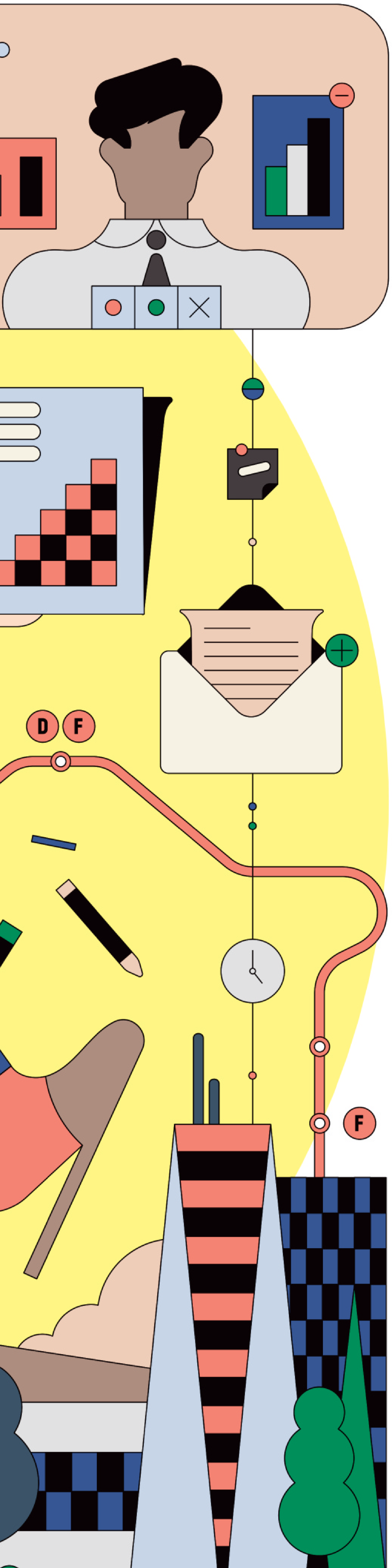
At the committee meeting, members debated how better to honor Daniels, whose sacrifice they compared to that of the New Market cadets. Keith Gibson, VMI's museum director, said he'd heard nothing about Daniels when he was a cadet in the 1970s. But recently, Gibson said, he had traveled to Alabama and retraced Daniels' path, from the jail, to the concrete block that absorbed his blood, to his grave. Gibson was moved to tears as he recounted the experience of praying over the site where Daniels gave his life for the cause of racial equality.

Gibson has spent his entire career at the institute. He is the author of the school's official history. Alums from the 1990s recall him roaming campus in a Confederate uniform and presiding over the burial of Jackson's horse in full battle dress. But as he talked about Daniels' legacy, he sounded positively, well, woke. Stokely Carmichael, who was in jail with Daniels, tried to warn the young seminarian, but Daniels was undeterred, Gibson told the committee. Like a soldier going into battle, he may not have known he would be killed, but he knew he was putting himself in danger.

The old white man's voice shook with emotion. "There's the heroism. There's the courage," Gibson said. "The work is still under way that Jonathan Daniels was involved in, and it falls to us." We are all on a journey, each at his own pace. —*With reporting by* LESLIE DICKSTEIN, MADELINE ROACHE *and* SIMMONE SHAH

VMI's board voted in May to strip Jackson's name from the mantra adorning the barracks


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THE GREAT REOPENING

The workplace doesn't work. Now's our chance to reinvent it

BY JOANNE LIPMAN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRATISLAV MILENKOVIC FOR TIME

UNTIL MARCH 2020, KARI AND BRITT ALTIZER OF RICHMOND, Va., put in long hours at work, she in life-insurance sales and he as a restaurant manager, to support their young family. Their lives were frenetic, their schedules controlled by their jobs.

Then the pandemic shutdown hit, and they, like millions of others, found their world upended. Britt was briefly furloughed. Kari, 31, had to quit to care for their infant son. A native of Peru, she hoped to find remote work as a Spanish translator. When that didn't pan out, she took a part-time sales job with a cleaning service that allowed her to take her son to the office. But as the baby grew into a toddler, that wasn't feasible either. Meanwhile, the furlough prompted her husband, 30, to reassess his own career. "I did some soul searching. During the time I was home, I was gardening and really loving life," says Britt, who grew up on a farm and studied environmental science in college. "I realized working outdoors was something I had to get back to doing."

Today, both have quit their old jobs and made a sharp pivot: they opened a landscaping business together. "We are taking a leap of faith," Kari says, after realizing the prepandemic way of working simply doesn't make sense anymore. Now they have control over their schedules, and her mom has moved nearby to care for their son. "I love what I'm doing. I'm closer to my goal of: I get to go to work, I don't have to go to work," Kari says. "We aren't supposed to live to work. We're supposed to work to live."

As the postpandemic great reopening unfolds, millions of others are also reassessing their relationship to their jobs. The modern office was created after World War II, on a military model—strict hierarchies, created by men for men, with an assumption that there is a wife to handle duties at home. But after years of gradual change in Silicon Valley and elsewhere, there's a growing realization that the model is broken. Millions of people have spent the past year reevaluating their priorities. How much time do they want to spend in an office? Where do they want to live if they can work remotely? Do they want to switch careers? For many, this has become a moment to literally redefine what *is* work.

More fundamentally, the pandemic has masked a deep unhappiness that a startling number of Americans have with the

workplace. During the first stressful months of quarantine, job turnover plunged; people were just hoping to hang on to what they had, even if they hated their jobs. For many more millions of essential workers, there was never a choice but to keep showing up at stores, on deliveries and in factories, often at great risk to themselves, with food and agricultural workers facing a higher chance of death on the job. But now millions of white collar professionals and office workers appear poised to jump. Anthony Klotz, an associate professor of management at Texas A&M University, set off a Twitterstorm by predicting, "The great resignation is coming."

But those conversations miss a much more consequential point. The true significance isn't what we are leaving; it's what we are going toward. In a surprising phenomenon, people are not just abandoning jobs but switching professions. This is a radical reassessment of our careers, a great reset in how we think about work. A Pew survey in January found that 66% of unemployed people have seriously considered changing occupations—and significantly, that phenomenon is common to those at every income level, not just the privileged high earners. A third of those surveyed have started taking courses or job retraining. Pew doesn't have comparable earlier data, but in a 2016 survey, about 80% of people reported being somewhat or very satisfied with their jobs.

Early on in the pandemic, Lucy Chang Evans, a 48-year-old Naperville, Ill., civil engineer, quit her job to help her three kids with remote learning while pursuing an online MBA. Becoming "a lot more introspective," she realized she's done with toxic workplaces: "I feel like I'm not willing to put up with abusive behavior at work anymore." She also plans to pivot into a more meaningful career, focused on tackling climate change.

The deep unhappiness with jobs points to a larger problem in how workplaces are structured. The line between work and home has been blurring for decades—and with the pandemic, obliterated completely for many of us, as we have been literally living at work. Meanwhile, the stark divide between white collar workers and those with hourly on-site jobs—grocery clerks, bus drivers, delivery people—became painfully visible. During the pandemic, nearly half of all employees with advanced degrees were working remotely, while more than 90% of those with a high school diploma or less had to show up in person, CoStar found.

Business leaders are as confused as the rest of us—perhaps more so—when it comes to navigating the multiple demands and expectations of the new workplace. Consider their conflicting approaches to remote work. Tech firms including Twitter, Dropbox, Shopify and Reddit are all allowing employees the option to work at home permanently, while oil company Phillips 66 brought back most staff to its Houston headquarters almost a year ago. Target and Walmart have both allowed corporate staff to work remotely, while low-paid workers faced potential COVID-19 exposure on store floors.

In the financial industry, titans like Blackstone, JPMorgan and Goldman Sachs expect employees to be back on site this summer. JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon recently declared that remote work "doesn't work for those who want to hustle. It doesn't work in terms of spontaneous idea generation," and "you know, people don't like commuting, but so what."

66%

PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WITHOUT JOBS WHO WANT TO CHANGE CAREERS, A PEW STUDY FOUND

81%

PROPORTION OF PROFESSIONALS A HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL SURVEY SAID WOULD PREFER A HYBRID WORK SCHEDULE

There's a real risk that office culture could devolve into a class system, with on-site employees favored over remote workers. WeWork CEO Sandeep Mathrani recently insisted that the "least engaged are very comfortable working from home," a stunning indictment that discounts working parents everywhere and suggests that those who might need flexibility—like those caring for relatives—couldn't possibly be ambitious.

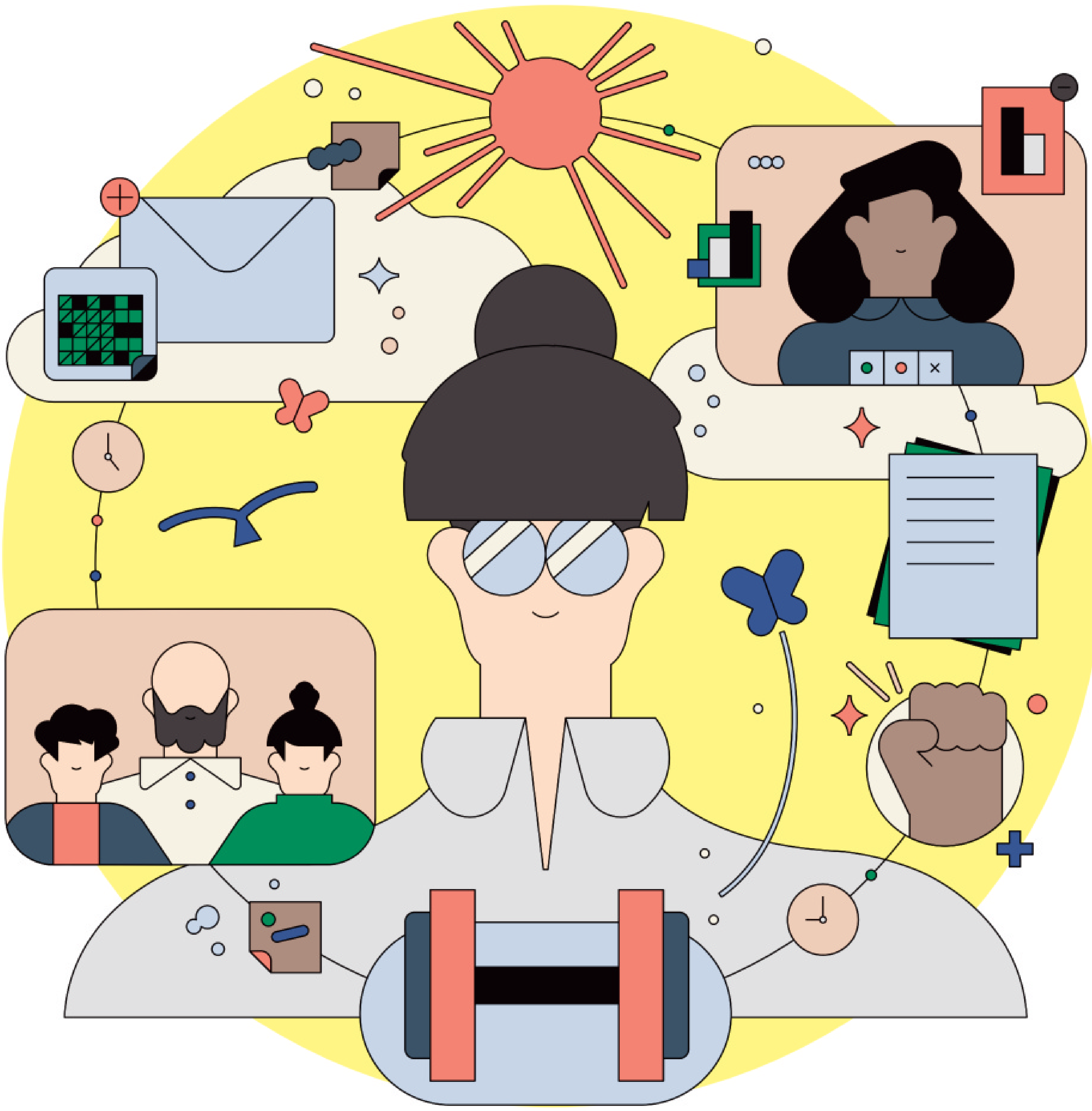
Mathrani's comments are yet another reminder that the pandemic shutdown has been devastating for women, throwing into high relief just how inhospitable and precarious the workplace can be for caretakers. Faced with the impossible task of handling the majority of childcare and homeschooling, 4.2 million women dropped out of the labor force from February 2020 to April 2020—and nearly 2 million still haven't returned. Oxfam calculates that women globally lost a breathtaking $800 billion in income in 2020. Women's progress in terms of U.S. workforce participation has been set back by more than three decades.

Despite Mathrani's assertion, there's little evidence that remote employees are less engaged. There is, however, plenty of evidence that we're actually working more. A study by Harvard Business School found that people were working on average 48 minutes more per day after the lockdown started. A new research paper from the University of Chicago and University of Essex found remote workers upped their hours by 30%, yet didn't increase productivity.

All this comes at a moment when business and culture have never been more intertwined. As work has taken over people's lives and Americans are doing less together outside the office, more and more of people's political beliefs and social life are defining the office. In thousands of Zoom meetings over the past year, employees have demanded that their leaders take on systemic racism, sexism, transgender rights, gun control and more. People have increasingly outsize expectations of their employers. This year, business surpassed nonprofits to become the most trusted institution globally, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer, and people are looking to business to take an active role tackling racism, climate change and misinformation.

"Employees, customers, shareholders—all of these stakeholder groups—are saying, You've got to deal with some of these issues," says Ken Chenault, a former chief executive of American Express. "If people are going to spend so much time at a company, they really want to believe that the mission and behavior of the company is consistent with, and aligned with, their values." Hundreds of top executives signed on to a statement that he and Ken Frazier, the CEO of Merck, organized this year opposing "any discriminatory legislation" in the wake of Georgia's new voting law. Yet those same moves have landed some executives in the crosshairs of conservative politicians.

That points to the central dilemma facing us all as we rethink how we work. Multiple surveys suggest Americans are eager to work remotely at least part of the time—the ideal consensus



seems to be coalescing around three days in the office and two days remote. Yet the hybrid model comes with its own complexities. If managers with families and commutes choose to work remotely, but younger employees are on site, the latter could lack opportunities for absorbing corporate culture or for being mentored. Hybrid work could also limit those serendipitous office interactions that lead to promotions and breakthrough ideas.

YET IF IT'S DONE CORRECTLY, there's a chance to bring balance back into our lives, to a degree that we haven't seen at least since the widespread adoption of email and cell phones. Not just parents but all employees would be better off with more flexible time to recharge, exercise and, oh yeah, sleep. There's also a hidden benefit in a year of sweatpants wearing and Zoom meetings: a more casual, more authentic version of our colleagues, with unwashed hair, pets, kids and laundry all on display. That too would help level the playing field, especially for professional women who, over the course of their careers, spend thousands of hours more than men just getting ready for work.

There are glimmers of progress. During the pandemic, as rates of depression and anxiety soared—to 40% of all U.S. adults, quadruple previous levels—a number of companies began offering enhanced mental-health services and paid "recharge" days, among them LinkedIn, Citigroup, Red Hat and SAP. Some companies are offering subsidized childcare, including Microsoft, Facebook, Google and Home Depot. More than 200 businesses, along with the advocacy group Time's Up, recently created a coalition to push for child- and eldercare solutions. It's essential that these measures stay in place.

We have an unprecedented opportunity right now to reinvent, to create workplace culture almost from scratch. Over the past decades, various types of businesses have rotated in and out of favor—conglomerates in the '60s, junk bonds in the '80s, tech in the '00s—but the basic workplace structure, of office cubicles and face time, has remained the same. It's time to allow the creative ideas to flow. For example, companies are stuck with millions of square feet of now unused office space—sublet space soared by 40% from late 2019 to this year, CoStar found. Why not use that extra space for day care? Working parents of small children would jump at the opportunity to have a safe, affordable option, while having their kids close by.

Now would also be a good time to finally dump the 9-to-5, five-day workweek. For plenty of job categories, that cadence no longer makes sense. Multiple companies are already experimenting with four-day workweeks, including Unilever New Zealand, and Spain is rolling out a trial nationwide. Companies that have already tested the concept have reported significant productivity increases, from 20% (New Zealand's Perpetual Guardian, which has since made the practice permanent) to 40% (Microsoft Japan, in a limited trial). That schedule too would be more equitable for working moms, many of whom work supposedly part-time jobs with reduced pay yet are just as productive as their fully paid colleagues. Meanwhile, the 9-to-5 office-hours standard becomes irrelevant, especially when people don't have meetings and are working remotely or in different time zones.

While we're at it, let's kill the commute. Some companies are already creating neighborhood co-working hubs for those who live far from the home office. Outdoor retailer REI is going a step further: it sold its new Bellevue, Wash., headquarters in a cost-cutting move and is now setting up satellite offices in the surrounding Puget Sound area. Restaurants might get in on the act too; they could convert dining areas into co-working spaces during off hours, or rent out private rooms by the day for meetings and brainstorming sessions.

Some of the shortcomings of remote work—the lack of camaraderie and mentoring, the fear of being forgotten—may ultimately be bridged by new technology. Google and Microsoft are already starting to integrate prominent remote-videoconferencing capabilities more fully into meeting spaces, so that remote workers don't seem like an afterthought. Augmented reality, which so far has been used most notably for games like *Pokémon Go,* could end up transforming into a useful work tool, allowing remote workers to "seem" to be in the room with on-site workers.

There are plenty of other ideas out there, and a popular groundswell of support for flexibility and life balance that makes sense for all of us. Will we get there, or will we slide back into our old ways? That's on us. Companies that don't reinvent may well pay the price, losing top talent to businesses that do.

"We aren't robots," Kari Altizer says. "Before, we thought it was impossible to work with our children next to us. Now, we know it is possible—but we have to change the ways in which we work."

Lipman is the author of That's What She Said *and a former editor in chief of* USA Today; *her next book is on the art and science of reinvention*

‘I will never forget the way my heart sank. You have to buy your own baby back almost.’

SHYANNE KLUPP





Society

The Baby Brokers

INSIDE THE U.S.'S UNREGULATED PRIVATE-ADOPTION INDUSTRY

By Tik Root

SHYANNE KLUPP WAS 20 YEARS OLD AND HOMELESS WHEN she met her boyfriend in 2009. Within weeks, the two had married, and within months, she was pregnant. "I was so excited," says Klupp. Soon, however, she learned that her new husband was facing serious jail time, and she reluctantly agreed to start looking into how to place their expected child for adoption. The couple called one of the first results that Google spat out: Adoption Network Law Center (ANLC).

Klupp says her initial conversations with ANLC went well; the adoption counselor seemed kind and caring and made her and her husband feel comfortable choosing adoption. ANLC quickly sent them packets of paperwork to fill out, which included questions ranging from personal-health and substance-abuse history to how much money the couple would need for expenses during the pregnancy.

Klupp and her husband entered in the essentials: gas money, food, blankets and the like. She remembers thinking, "I'm not trying to sell my baby." But ANLC, she says, pointed out that the prospective adoptive parents were rich. "That's not enough," Klupp recalls her counselor telling her. "You can ask for more." So the couple added maternity clothes, a new set of tires, and books for her husband to read in jail, Klupp says. Then, in January 2010, she signed the initial legal paperwork for adoption, with the option to revoke. (In the U.S., an expectant mother has the right to change her mind anytime before birth, and after for a period that varies state by state. Any promise or contract that presumes otherwise could constitute the buying or selling of an infant, which is illegal in the U.S.)

Klupp, shown here at her California home on Nov. 21, 2020, regrets placing her child for adoption back in 2010

PHOTOGRAPH BY CAYCE CLIFFORD FOR TIME

Klupp says she had recurring doubts about her decision. But when she called her ANLC counselor to ask whether keeping the child was an option, she says, "they made me feel like, if I backed out, then the adoptive parents were going to come after me for all the money that they had spent." That would have been thousands of dollars. In shock, Klupp says, she hung up and never broached the subject again. The counselor, who no longer works with the company, denies telling Klupp she would have to pay back any such expense money. But Klupp's then roommates—she had found housing at this point—both recall her being distraught over the prospect of legal action if she didn't follow through with the adoption. She says she wasn't aware that an attorney, whose services were paid for by the adoptive parents, represented her.

"I will never forget the way my heart sank," says Klupp. "You have to buy your own baby back almost." Seeing no viable alternative, she ended up placing her son, and hasn't seen him since he left the hospital 11 years ago.

MOVIES MAY PORTRAY the typical adoption as a childless couple saving an unwanted baby from a crowded orphanage. But the reality is that, at any given time, an estimated 1 million U.S. families are looking to adopt—many of them seeking infants. That figure dramatically outpaces the number of available babies in the country. Some hopeful parents turn to international adoption, though in recent years other countries have curtailed the number of children they send abroad. There's also the option to adopt from the U.S. foster-care system, but it's an often slow-moving endeavor with a limited number of available infants. For those with means, there's private domestic adoption.

ANLC was started in 1996 by Allan and Carol Gindi, who first called it the Adoption Network. The company says it has since worked on over 6,000 adoptions and that it's the largest law corporation in the nation providing adoption services (though limited publicly available data makes that difficult to verify). ANLC's home page is adorned with testimonials from grateful clients. Critics, however, see the organization as a paradigm of the largely unregulated private-adoption system in the U.S., which has made baby brokering a lucrative business.

Problems with private domestic adoption appear to be widespread. Interviews with dozens of current and former adoption professionals, birth parents, adoptive parents and reform advocates, as well as a review of hundreds of pages of documents, reveal issues ranging from commission schemes and illegal gag clauses to Craigslistesque ads for babies and lower rates for parents willing to adopt babies of any race. No one centrally tracks private adoptions in the U.S., but best estimates, from the Donaldson Adoption Institute (2006) and the National Council for Adoption (2014), respectively, peg the number of annual nonrelative infant adoptions at roughly 13,000 to 18,000. Public agencies are involved in approximately 1,000 of those, suggesting that the vast majority of domestic infant adoptions involve the private sector—and the market forces that drive it.

"It's a fundamental problem of supply and demand," says Celeste Liversidge, an adoption attorney in California who would like to see reforms to the current system. The scarcity of available infants, combined with the emotions of desperate adoptive parents and the advent of the Internet, has helped enable for-profit middlemen—from agencies and lawyers to consultants and facilitators—to charge fees that frequently stretch into the tens of thousands of dollars per case.

A 2021 ANLC agreement, reviewed by TIME and Newsy, shows that prospective parents were charged more than $25,000 in fees—not including legal costs for finalizing the adoption, birth-mother expenses and other add-ons (like gender specification). The full tab, say former employees, can balloon to more than double that.

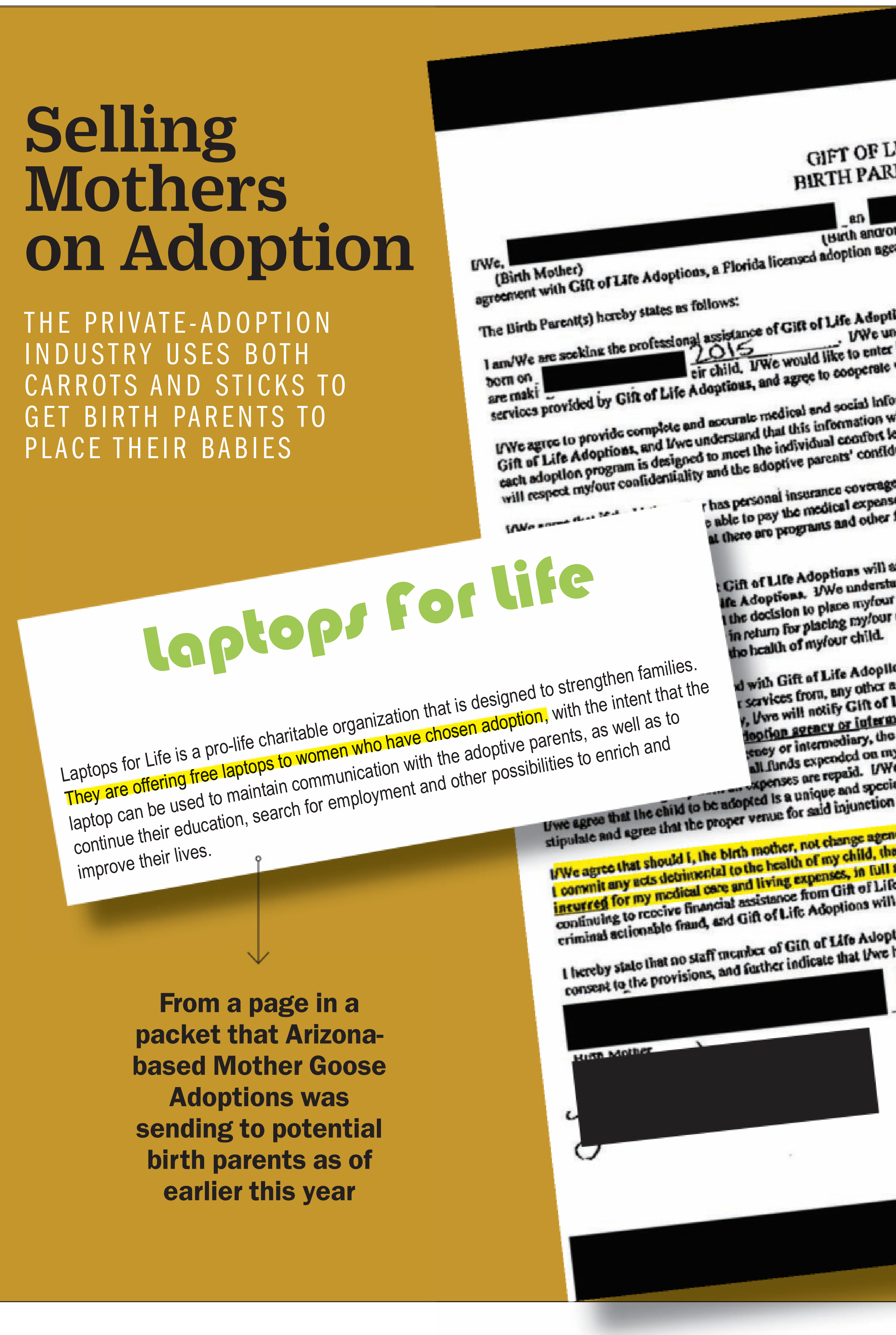
"The money's the problem," says Adam Pertman, author of *Adoption Nation* and president of the National Center on Adoption and Permanency. "Anytime you put dollar signs and human beings in the same sentence, you have a recipe for disaster."

Even though federal tax credits can subsidize private adoptions (as much as $14,300 per child for the adopting parents), there is no federal regulation of the industry. Relevant laws—governing everything from allowable financial support to how birth parents give their consent to an adoption—are made at the state level and vary widely. Some state statutes, for example, cap birth-mother expenses, while others don't even address the issue. Mississippi allows birth mothers six months to change their mind; in Tennessee, it's just three days. After the revocation period is over, it's "too bad, so sad," says Renee Gelin, president of Saving Our Sisters, an organization aimed at helping expectant parents preserve their families. "The mother has little recourse."

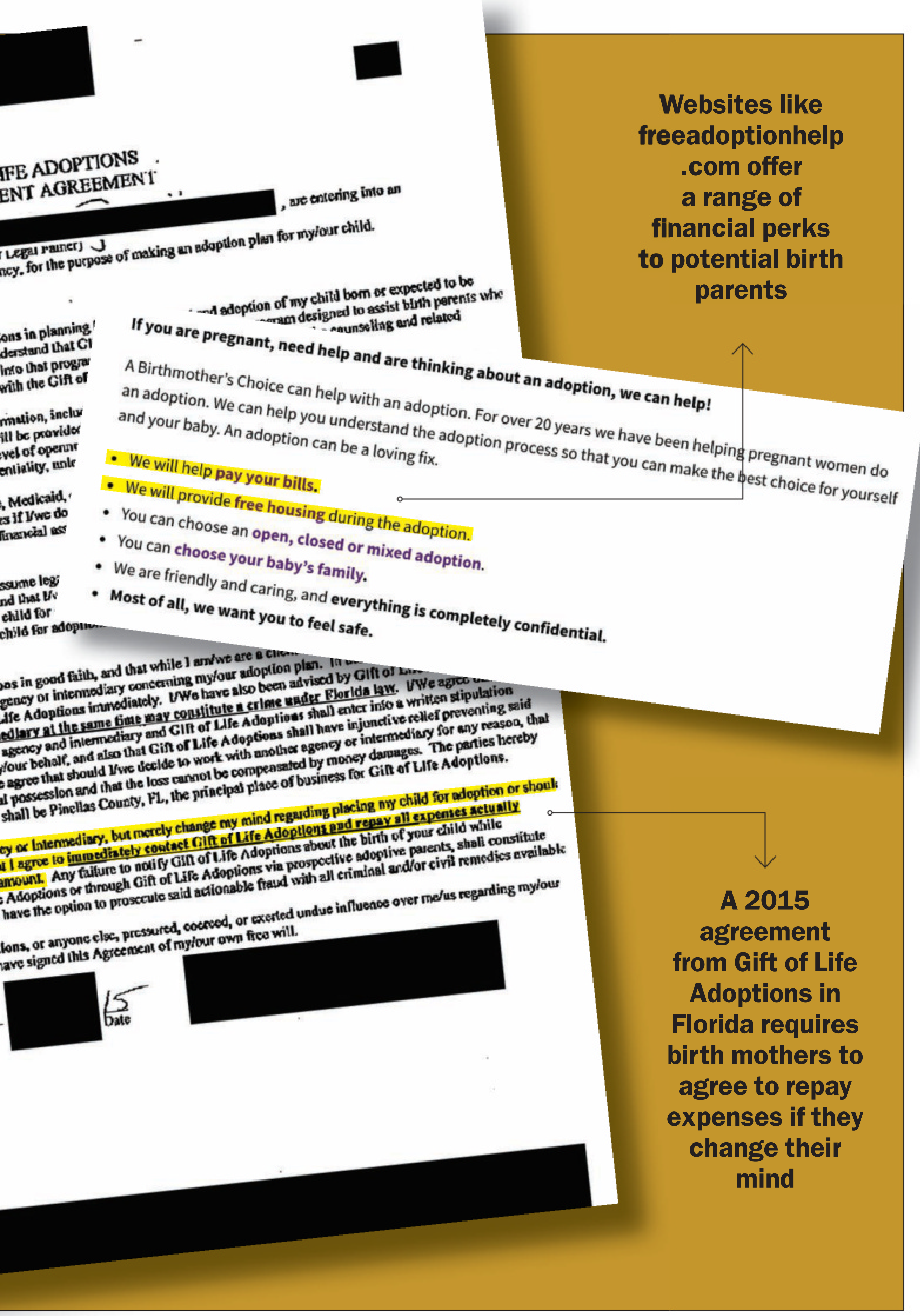
Liversidge founded the nonprofit AdoptMatch, which

Selling Mothers on Adoption

THE PRIVATE-ADOPTION INDUSTRY USES BOTH CARROTS AND STICKS TO GET BIRTH PARENTS TO PLACE THEIR BABIES



From a page in a packet that Arizona-based Mother Goose Adoptions was sending to potential birth parents as of earlier this year



Websites like freeadoptionhelp.com offer a range of financial perks to potential birth parents

A 2015 agreement from Gift of Life Adoptions in Florida requires birth mothers to agree to repay expenses if they change their mind

describes itself as a "mobile app and online resource" that aims to "increase an expectant parent's accessibility to qualified adoptive parents and ethical adoption professionals." She says the hodgepodge of state statutes invites abuse: "Anyone that knows or learns the system—it doesn't take much—can exploit those loopholes very easily for financial gain."

THIRTEEN FORMER ANLC EMPLOYEES, whose time at the organization spanned from 2006 to 2015, were interviewed for this story. Many asked to remain anonymous, out of fear of retaliation from the Gindis or ANLC. (The couple has filed multiple suits, including for defamation, over the years.) "The risk is too great for my family," wrote one former employee in a text to TIME and Newsy. But whether on or off the record, the former employees told largely similar stories of questionable practices at an organization profiting off both adoptive and expectant parents. "These are such vulnerable people," says one former employee. "They deserve more than greed."

The Gindis have long faced questions about their adoption work. In 2006, the Orange County district attorney filed a scathing complaint contending that while operating Adoption Network, the couple had committed 11 violations, including operating as a law firm without an attorney on staff and falsely advertising Carol as having nursing degrees. Admitting no wrongdoing, the Gindis agreed to pay a $100,000 fine.

Since around that time, the Gindis' exact involvement with ANLC has been difficult to discern amid a web of other companies, brands and titles. They both declined interview requests, but Allan did respond to emailed questions, explaining that he plays what he termed "an advertising role" for ANLC, including for the company's current president, Lauren Lorber (the Gindis' daughter), who took over the law practice in 2015. Before that, an attorney named Kristin Yellin owned ANLC. Former employees, though, say that despite an outwardly delineated setup, Allan in particular has remained heavily involved in ANLC operations. As far back as 2008, even though Yellin was the titular owner, "everyone knew that Allan Gindi ran it," according to former employee Cary Sweet. (Sweet and other employees were plaintiffs in a 2010 discrimination and unlawful business practices lawsuit against ANLC. The company denied the allegations and the parties settled for an amount that Sweet says she isn't allowed to reveal but called "peanuts.")

In an interview, Yellin bristled at the idea that Allan Gindi was in charge during her ownership period, saying, "I realized what the Gindis' role was and how to put boundaries on that." Lorber, who declined an interview for this story, wrote via email that Allan has been a "leader" in adoption marketing. He maintains, also by email, that over a 25-year period, each attorney for whom he has provided his "highly specialized marketing services" has been "more than satisfied." In an earlier text message, Allan also characterized the reporting for this story as "an attack on the wonderful work that Adoption Network has done and continues to do."

Sweet, who worked with both expectant and adoptive parents at ANLC from 2008 to 2011, says she wasn't aware of Klupp's experience but remembers a situation involving a staff member's threatening to call child protective services on a mother if she didn't place her child for adoption. In a 2011 deposition taken as part of Sweet's lawsuit, Yellin stated that the employee in question had told her that they had conveyed to the mother that "if you end up not going through with this, you know social services will probably be back in your life." Yellin said that she found the comment inappropriate in context but did not perceive it as threatening or coercive.

Lorber, who has owned ANLC since late 2015, wrote in an email that she's unaware of any incidents in which birth mothers were told they would have to pay back expenses if they chose not to place their child. But Klupp isn't the only expectant mother to say she felt pressured by ANLC. Gracie Hallax placed two children through ANLC, in 2017 and 2018. Although the company arranged for lodging during her pregnancy (including, she says, in a bedbug-infested motel), she recalls an ANLC representative's telling her that she could have to pay back expenses if she backed out of the adoptions. Madeline Grimm, a birth mother who placed her child through ANLC in 2019, also says she was informed that she might have to return expense money if she didn't go through with the adoption. "That was something that I would think of if I was having any kind of doubt," she says. "Like, well, sh-t, I'd have to pay all this back."

The experiences described by Klupp, Hallax and Grimm fit a pattern of practices at ANLC that former employees say were concerning. Many describe a pervasive pressure to bring people—whether birth parents or adoptive couples—

in the door. This was driven, at least in part, they say, by a "profit sharing" model of compensation in which, after meeting certain targets, employees could earn extra by signing up more adoptive couples or completing more matches. Former employees say birth mothers who did multiple placements through ANLC were sometimes referred to as "frequent flyers." (Lorber and Yellin both say they have never heard that term.)

"The whole thing became about money and not about good adoption practices," says one former employee. As they saw it, ANLC made a priority of "bringing in the next check."

Adoptive parents, former employees say, were sometimes provided inaccurate statistics on how often the company's attempts to matchmake were successful. "They almost made it seem like birth mothers were lining up to give their babies away," says one. "That's not reality." (Yellin says in the 2011 deposition that the data were outdated, not inaccurate.) Clients pay their fees in two nonrefundable installments, one at the beginning of the process and another after matching with a birth mother. As a result, former employees say, if the adoption fell through, there was little financial incentive for ANLC to rematch the parents, and those couples were routinely not presented to other birth mothers. "Counselors were being pressured to do this by the higher-ups," claims one former employee, recalling instructions to "not match couples that are not bringing in money. Period."

SOME PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS whom the company deemed harder to match—those who were overweight, for example, say former employees—were given a limited agreement that timed out, rather than the standard open-ended contract. There was also a separate agreement for those willing to adopt Black or biracial babies, for which the company offered its services at a discount. (In her 2011 deposition, Yellin acknowledged that there were multiple versions of the agreement and providing staff with obesity charts. When asked if obesity was a reason clients got a limited agreement, she said, "Specifically because they were obese, no." In regard to whether what a couple looked like was considered, she responded, "I can only speculate. I do not know.")

Former ANLC employees also allege the company would encourage pregnant women to relocate to states where the adoption laws were more favorable and finalizations more likely. "I believe it's called venue hunting," one recalls. And while that former employee made sure to note that ANLC did produce some resoundingly positive, well-fitting adoptions, they say the outcome was largely a matter of luck, "like throwing spaghetti on a refrigerator to see if it'll stick."

Yellin acknowledges that when she took over the company in 2007, "there was a feeling that some of the adoption advisers had felt pressured just to make matches." But she says she worked to address that and other issues. Yellin says she put an end to the use of the limited agreement, and denies that ANLC ever advised birth mothers to relocate to other states to make an adoption easier. She also says she wasn't aware of any instances of birth mothers' being coerced into placing their babies. Other practices, though, she defended. Charging lower fees to parents willing to adopt babies of any race makes business sense, Yellin says. "Their marketing costs were lower. That's just the reality of it." Lorber maintains that fee structure stopped in 2019. More broadly, she noted that of the thousands of parties that ANLC has worked with over the years, the complaint rate is less than half of 1% and "that is one track record to be proud of!"

But ANLC's practices over the years could have legal implications. Experts say that reports of any organization's putting pressure on birth parents to go through with an adoption would raise concerns about whether those parents placed their children under duress—which can be grounds for invalidating consent and potentially overturning adoptions. And ANLC may be violating consumer-protection laws with a clause in its agreement that makes clients "agree not to talk negatively about ANLC's efforts, service, positions, policies and employees with anyone, including potential Birth Parents, other adoption-related entities or on social media and other Internet platforms." The federal Consumer Review Fairness Act of 2016 makes contract clauses that restrict consumer reviews illegal, as does the 2014 California "Yelp" bill.

"It would certainly be unlawful," says Paul Levy, an attorney with the consumer-advocacy organization Public Citizen, who reviewed the agreement. "If they put this in the contract, what do they have to hide?"

STORIES OF ENTICEMENT and pressure tactics in the private-adoption industry abound. Mother Goose Adoptions, a middleman organization in Arizona, has pitched a "laptop for life" program and accommodations in "warm, sunny Arizona." A Is 4 Adoption, a facilitator in California, made a payment of roughly $12,000 to a woman after she gave birth, says an attorney involved in the adoption case. While the company says it "adheres to the adoption laws that are governed by the state of California," the lawyer, who asked to remain anonymous because they still work on adoptions in the region, says they told A Is 4 Adoption's owner, "You should not be paying lump sums. It looks like you're buying a baby."

Jessalynn Speight worked for ANLC in 2015 and says private adoption is rife with problems: "It's much more rampant than anyone can understand." Speight, whose nonprofit Tied at the Heart runs retreats for birth parents, worries that the industry sometimes turns into a cycle of dependency, as struggling women place multiple children as a means of financial support. (The same incentive may also encourage scamming adoptive birth parents, with purported birth parents who don't actually intend to place a child for adoption or are never even pregnant.) Anne Moody, author of the 2018 book *The Children Money Can Buy,* about foster care and adoption, says the system can amount to "basically producing babies for money."

Claudia Corrigan D'Arcy, a birth-parent advocate and birth mother who blogs extensively about adoption, says she routinely hears of women facing expense-repayment pressures. Some states, such as California and Nevada, explicitly consider birth-parent expenses an "act of charity" that birth parents don't have to pay back. In other states, though, nothing prohibits adoption entities from trying to obligate birth parents to repay expenses when a match fails.

"How is that not blackmail?" D'Arcy asks, emphasizing that in most states, fraud or duress can be a reason for invalidating a



Jessalyn Speight was troubled by her work as an employee at ANLC

LINDSAY D'ADDATO FOR TIME

birth parent's consent. According to Debra Guston, adoption director for the Academy of Adoption & Assisted Reproduction Attorneys, conditioning support on a promise to repay or later demanding repayment if there is no placement is "at very least unethical."

States are ostensibly in charge of keeping private-adoption entities in line. Agencies are generally licensed or registered with the relevant departments of health, human services or children and families. Attorneys practice under the auspices of a state bar. But even when misdeeds are uncovered, action may be anemic and penalties minimal. In 2007, Dorene and Kevin Whisler were set to adopt through the Florida-based agency Adoption Advocates. When the agency told the Whislers the baby was born with disabilities, the couple decided not to proceed with the adoption—but they later found out that the baby was healthy and had been placed with a different couple, for another fee. After news coverage of the case, Adoption Advocates found itself under investigation. In a 2008 letter to Adoption Advocates, the Florida department of children and families (DCF) wrote that it had found "expenses that are filed with the courts from your agency do not accurately reflect the expenses that are being paid to the natural mothers in many instances." Although DCF temporarily put the organization on a provisional license, a spokesperson for the department says that after "enhanced monitoring for compliance," it relicensed the company, and there have been no issues or complaints since. (When contacted, Adoption Advocates' attorney replied that the company is "unable to respond to your inquiries regarding specific individuals or cases.")

More recently, in 2018, the Utah department of human services (DHS) revoked the license of an agency called Heart and Soul Adoptions, citing violations ranging from not properly searching for putative fathers (a requirement in Utah) to insufficient tracking of birth-mother expenses. Rules prohibit anyone whose license is revoked from being associated with another licensed entity for five years. But a year later Heart and Soul owner Denise Garza was found to be working with Brighter Adoptions. DHS briefly placed Brighter on a conditional license for working with Garza but has since lifted all sanctions and never assessed any fines.

Enforcement is even harder when middlemen operate as consultants, facilitators or advertisers or under any number of other murky titles that critics believe are sometimes used to skirt regulations. There is little clarity on who is supposed to oversee these more amorphous intermediaries.

Jennifer Ryan (who sometimes goes by "Jennalee Ryan" or "Jennifer Potter") was first a "facilitator" and is now a kind of middleman to adoption middlemen. Her "national online advertising service" refers expectant parents to lawyers (including her own son), facilitators and other intermediaries; as of November 2020, the company was charging these middlemen fees starting at $18,800 for each birth-mother match (with the idea that the cost is passed on to families). Ryan declined an interview but, in an email, she says she does approximately 400 matches annually. Among the websites Ryan operates are Chosen Parents and Forever After Adoptions, which both include a section that lists babies for adoption, sort of like a Craigslist ad. One example from last August: "AVAILABLE Indian (as in Southeast Asia India) Baby to be born in the state of California in 2021....Estimated cost of this adoption is $35000."

MANY ADVOCATES SAY they would like to see reforms to private adoption in the U.S. Even Yellin, a proponent of private-sector involvement in the adoption space, says there probably ought to be more regulation. But calls for systematic change have remained largely unheeded, and agreeing on exactly what should be done can be difficult.

Some believe the problem could be addressed with greater federal-level oversight—pointing to the foster-care system, which a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services helps administer, as an example (albeit an imperfect

one). But Liversidge notes that family law has traditionally been a state issue and says that is where fixes should, and will likely need to, occur. She wants to see improvements such as an expansion of mandatory independent legal representation for birth parents, better tracking of adoption data and the reining in of excessive fees.

Illinois attempted to take a strong stand against adoption profiteering in a 2005 adoption-reform act, which barred out-of-state, for-profit intermediaries from engaging in adoption-related activities in the state. But Bruce Boyer, a law professor at Loyola University who championed the legislation, says, "We couldn't get anyone to enforce it." Only after much pushing and prodding, he adds, did advocates persuade the state to pursue a case against what Boyer called the "worst" offender: ANLC.

The Illinois attorney general filed a complaint in 2013 alleging that ANLC was breaking the law by offering and advertising adoption services in the state without proper licensing or approval. To fight the suit, ANLC retained a high-profile Chicago law firm, and within months, the parties had reached a settlement. ANLC agreed that it would not work directly with Illinois-based birth parents, but it did not admit any wrongdoing and called the resolution "fair and reasonable." Boyer disagrees. "They caved," he says of the state. "There were no meaningful consequences that came from a half-hearted attempt." The attorney general's office declined to comment.

What few changes have been made in adoption law are generally aimed at making the process easier for adoptive parents, who experts say tend to have more political and financial clout than birth parents. At the core of the inertia is lack of awareness. "There's an assumption in this country that adoption is a win-win solution," says Liversidge. "People don't understand what's going on."

'Children should not be treated the same as snow tires.'

ADAM PERTMAN, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL CENTER ON ADOPTION AND PERMANENCY

Many proponents of change would, at the very least, like to see private adoption move more toward a nonprofit model. "It's a baby-brokering business. That's really what it's turned into," says Kim Anderson, chief program officer at the Nebraska Children's Home Society, a nonprofit that does private adoptions only in Nebraska (with a sliding fee based on income) and which rarely allows adoptive parents to pay expenses for expectant parents.

Whatever shape reform ends up taking—or mechanism it occurs through—advocates say it will require a fundamental shift and decommodification of how the country approaches private adoption. "A civilized society protects children and vulnerable populations. It doesn't let the free market loose on them," says Liversidge. Or, as Pertman puts it, "Children should not be treated the same as snow tires."

Yellin kept working with ANLC as an attorney until late 2018. By then, she says adoption numbers had dropped significantly because of increased competition and a decreasing number of expectant mothers seeking to place their babies. But the company seems to still be very much in the adoption business. During the pandemic, Adoption Pro Inc., which operates ANLC, was approved for hundreds of thousands of dollars in stimulus loans, and its social media accounts suggest it has plenty of adoptive-parent clients. According to data from the search analytics service SpyFu, ANLC has also run hundreds of ads targeting expectant parents. For example, if you Googled the term "putting baby up for adoption" in January 2021, you might get shown an ANLC ad touting, "Financial & Housing Assistance Available."

Meanwhile, Allan Gindi continues to play an advertising role for ANLC (and to use an "@adoptionnetwork.com" email address). Court documents connected to a bankruptcy case show that, in 2019, Gindi expected to make $40,000 per month in adoption-advertising income. (He says that number was not ultimately realized but did not provide any more details.) Lorber's LinkedIn profile says that ANLC is a "$5 million dollar per year" business. "And that's just one family in Southern California," remarks Speight, who used to work for ANLC and who runs a birth-parent support nonprofit. "Think about all of the other adoption agencies where couples are paying even more money."

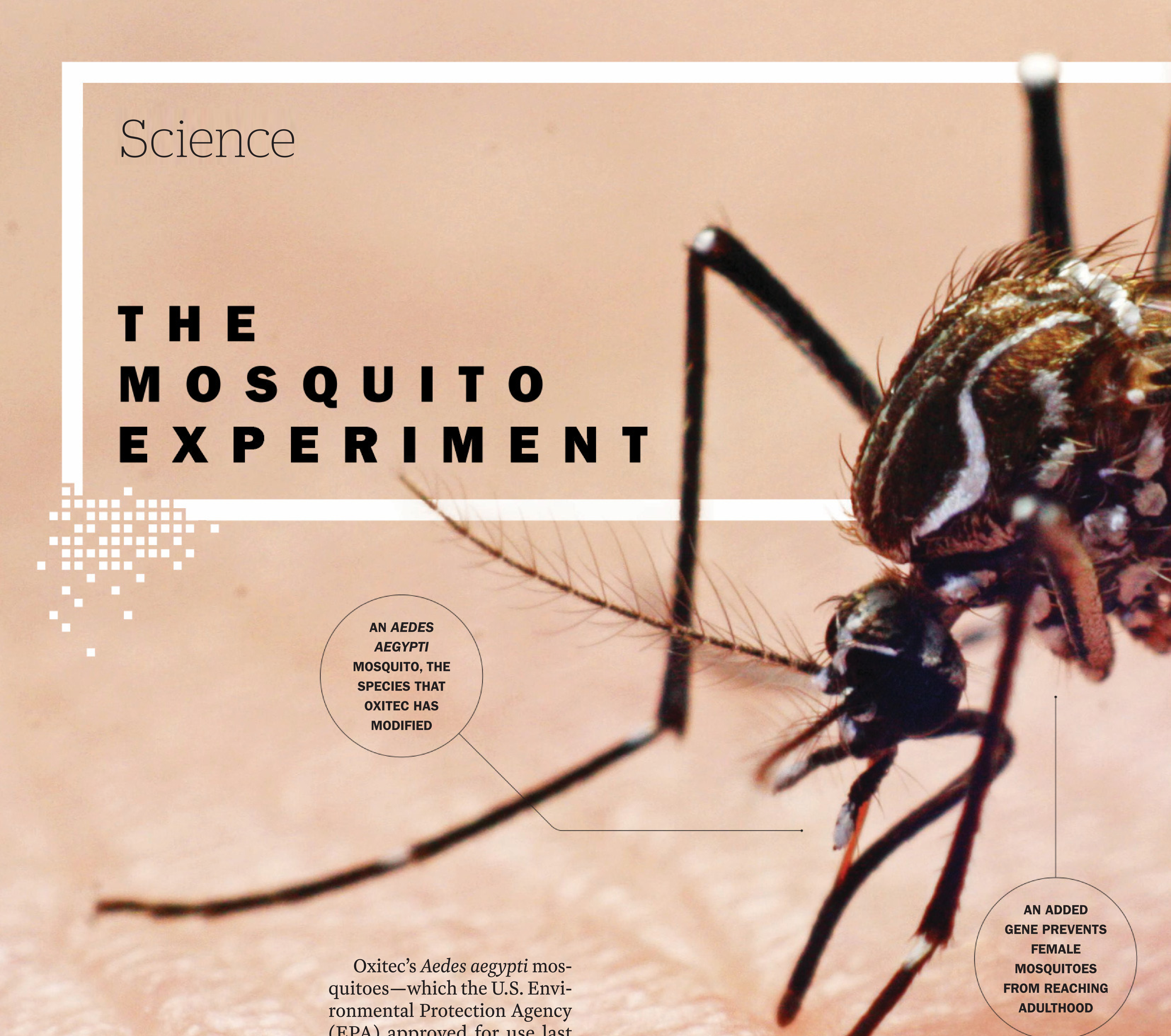
KLUPP'S FACEBOOK FEED still cycles through "memories" of posts she made when she was placing her son through ANLC. They're mournful but positive, she says; in them, she tended to frame the decision as an unfortunate necessity that put her son in a loving home. "I thought everything was really great," recalls Klupp, who has since immersed herself in the online adoption community. What she's learned has slowly chipped away at the pleasant patina that once surrounded her adoption journey; such a shift is so common, it has a name, "coming out of the fog."

"They take people who don't have money and are scared, and they use your fear to set you up with an adoption that you can't back out of," Klupp says of the industry. "I'm sure even the parents that adopted my son … didn't know half the stuff that went on behind the scenes. They probably paid this agency to find them a baby, and that's what they cared about. And this agency takes this money from these people who are desperate." Klupp isn't anti-adoption; in fact, she's been trying to adopt out of foster care. The problem, she says, is the profit. Today, she believes she has a better understanding of the extent to which ANLC influenced her and now views her decision as, at the very least, deliberately ill informed, if not outright coerced. She says she's taken to deleting the Facebook posts about her son's adoption as the reminders pop up—they're too painful.

"It seems like the agencies have some universal handbook on how to convince doubtful moms," she says. "I know in my heart that I would have kept my son if I had had the right answers." —*With reporting by* MARIAH ESPADA *and* MADELINE ROACHE

This story was reported and published in partnership with Newsy

THE MOSQUITO EXPERIMENT

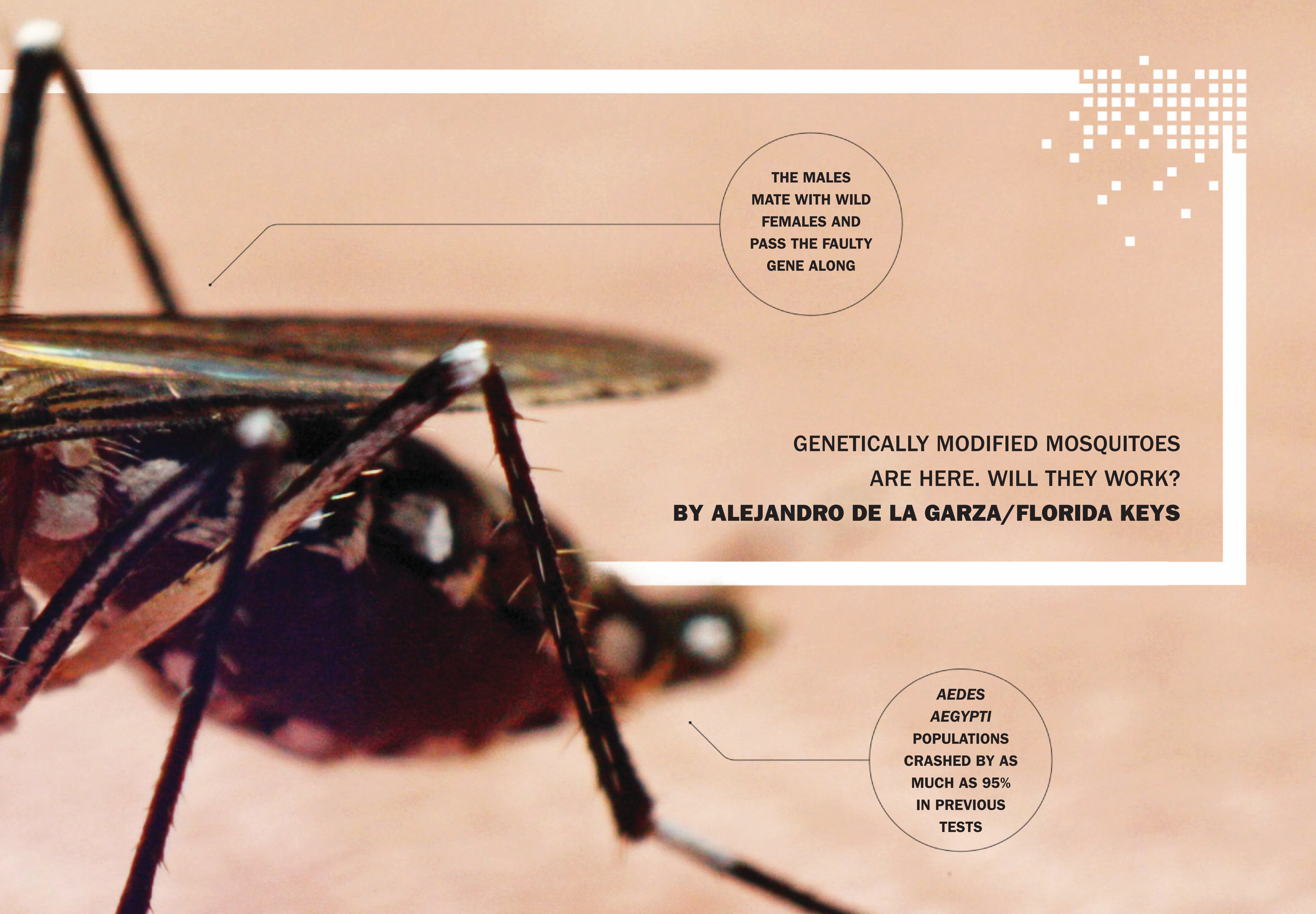


OUR MOSQUITO PROJECT TAKES FLIGHT, reads an eye-catching billboard off U.S. 1 in the Florida Keys. Sponsored by the local mosquito-control board and U.K.-based biotech firm Oxitec, the ad promotes a contentious plan to release millions of genetically modified *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes to test a new method of bioengineered pest control. The experiment, which began in late April, is the first such trial in the U.S. and has turned these islands into a battleground over science, government authority and humanity's right to modify nature.

Oxitec's *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes—which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved for use last year—are genetically modified to include a "self-limiting" gene that produces a fatal protein. The mosquitoes are raised in a laboratory and fed tetracycline, an antibiotic that prevents the added gene from activating. The mosquitoes' eggs are then left to hatch in the wild, without the antibiotic. The gene kills immature egg-laying females—the only ones that bite. But the males reach maturity, mate with wild females and pass on their faulty gene. Then their female progeny die, causing a population crash.

For the next few months about 1,000 mosquitoes will emerge from each of Oxitec's boxes every week; all told, the current phase of the trial will include some 140,000 mosquitoes, while nearly 20 million will take flight in the second phase beginning later this summer. Oxitec's goal is to prove to U.S. regulators that the technology will work here as well as the company reports it did in Brazil, where it says mosquito populations fell by 95% in similar tests.

Oxitec CEO Grey Frandsen says the company's work is existential. Mosquito-borne



GENETICALLY MODIFIED MOSQUITOES ARE HERE. WILL THEY WORK?

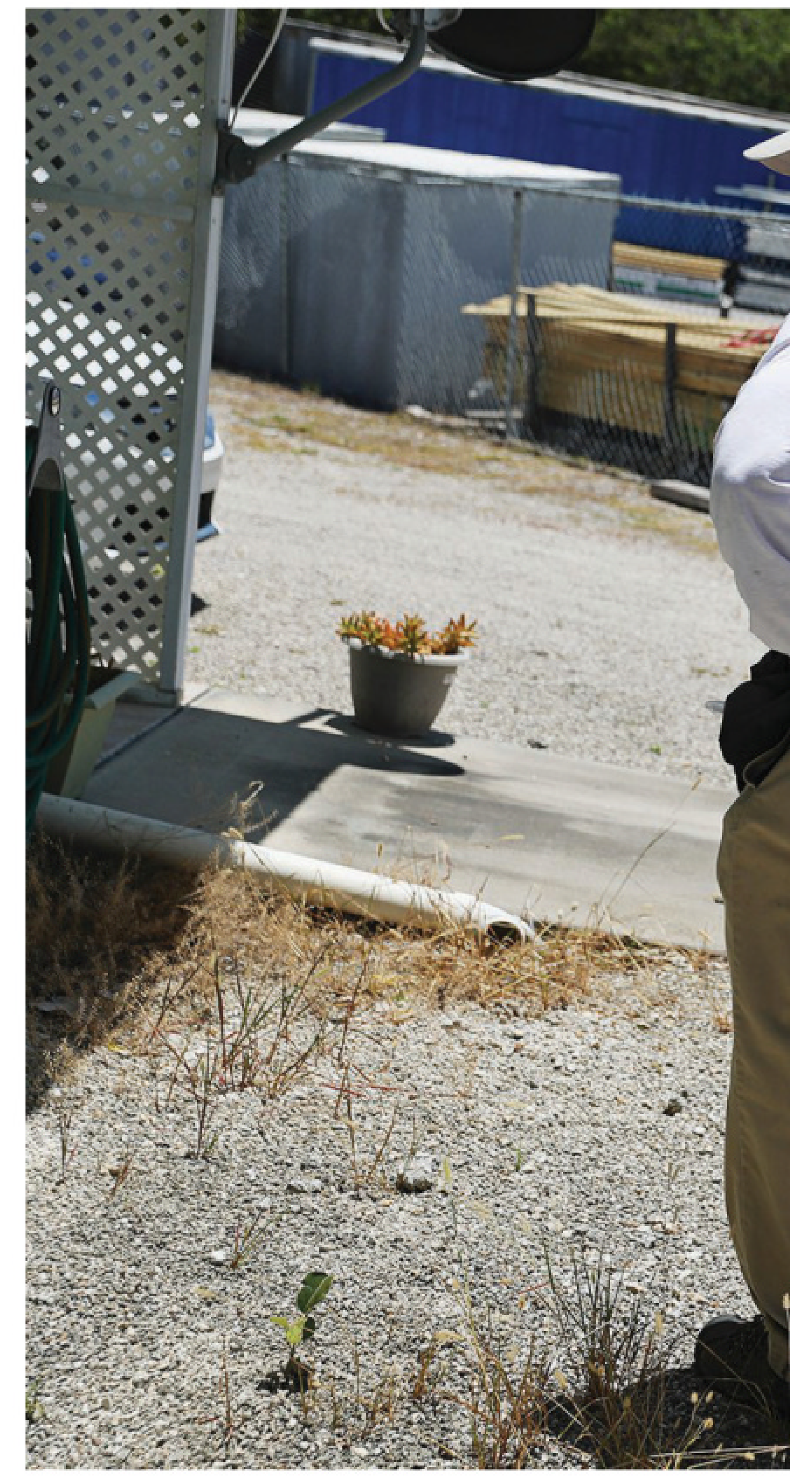
BY ALEJANDRO DE LA GARZA/FLORIDA KEYS

diseases kill more than 1 million people worldwide every year, and climate change stands to expand the range of the insects and the pathogens they carry. "We are seeking to develop and scale new technologies that will in essence allow the human race to continue to exist on this planet," says Frandsen.

BUT SENTIMENT against genetically modified organisms (GMO) runs hot across the U.S., and some locals here in the Keys are less than thrilled to be at the center of a massive genetic experiment. "The company just thinks that we're dumb," says Mara Daly, a mother and business owner who has been fighting Oxitec for years. Daly and others like her worry the modified mosquitoes could cause unforeseen health or ecological repercussions. Officials at the company say people like Daly represent a minority spreading fear and distorting scientific truth in an effort bankrolled by large anti-GMO organizations. "Oxitec is slandered," says Frandsen. "We are called every name in the book." Members of the Florida Keys Environmental Coalition, part of the local Coalition Against GMO Mosquitoes, say that their concerns are reasonable. They are a volunteer organization with "no money and no budget," they point out, citing a petition with more than 200,000 signatures against the Oxitec project, as well as a letter signed by dozens of local doctors asking for additional testing, as a measure of their support.

Equipped with two airplanes and six helicopters, the hangar at the Marathon, Fla., headquarters of the Florida Keys Mosquito Control District (FKMCD) feels like a military operation. Indeed, it's fighting a kind of war, flying sorties against enemy forces that can spread illness across these subtropical islands. Every day, dozens of FKMCD inspectors fan out through the Keys to sample standing water for mosquito larvae. They destroy small breeding sites themselves; to deal with larger ones, they call in airstrikes, dropping mosquito killer





to take out immature insects.

The *Aedes aegypti* mosquito might seem too delicate to merit such tactics. They dart around targets as if hesitant, ducking in for a sip of blood when the opportunity arises. Rajeev Vaidyanathan, a medical entomologist and Oxitec's director of U.S. programs, is able to easily identify *Aedes aegypti* by its flight pattern, a holdover from ancestors that preyed on rodents. "If you were to try to dance with a rodent, you've got to be careful," he says. "You have to bob and feint like a boxer."

They may move like featherweights, but *Aedes aegypti* are a heavyweight hazard. They feed almost exclusively on humans, and can transmit Zika and dengue viruses. Meanwhile, the FKMCD's firepower is becoming less effective as *Aedes aegypti* and other insects grow resistant to chemical pesticides. In 2009, the Keys saw its first outbreak of the often life-threatening dengue virus in decades, prompting local officials to approach Oxitec. Zika virus, linked to devastating neurological disorders, made its way to Florida in 2016, causing further alarm. Multiple scientists told TIME that these incidents show the urgent need to develop technologies like Oxitec's. "People in Florida, they've got a huge nuisance problem from mosquitoes," says John Mumford, an ecologist at Imperial College London. "They're very fortunate that they don't have a huge disease problem."

Yet Oxitec's work almost immediately became controversial among locals like Ed Russo, the president of the Florida Keys Environmental Coalition. The night before Oxitec's release announcement, Russo invited TIME to an outdoor dinner, where he ordered scotch and held forth, railing against the company. In part, he and his allies are concerned that Oxitec's mosquitoes could have unintended effects on residents and their environment. "If we're going to introduce an experimental pesticide, let's do it in a responsible way and do it in a transparent way," Russo says.



The anti-Oxitec contingent also says the company has been a bully in local politics. They say they were outmatched by Oxitec's money, which, for example, helped fund radio ads, direct mail and door knockers in the lead-up to a nonbinding 2016 referendum on the company's plans. Public records show that Intrexon Corp., then Oxitec's parent company, spent $176,000 funding a group called the Florida Keys Safety Alliance that was "dedicated to informed decision-making" on the release of genetically modified mosquitoes before that vote. (An Oxitec spokesperson says the company's efforts were meant to counter "falsehoods and misinformation" spread by anti-GMO groups.) The referendum passed handily in the Keys, though a local proposition on the project failed in Key Haven, where officials had originally been planning to release Oxitec's mosquitoes. (The release was later moved; FKMCD officials said they picked the new zones based on the referendum results, as well as local mosquito populations and EPA guidelines.)

Since then, locals who oppose the project, as well as some outside observers, say Keys residents have gotten little input into the process. "This is a very bad thing from a democratic perspective," says Sandra Schwindenhammer, a political scientist at the University of Giessen in Germany who has researched Oxitec and GMO governance. Oxitec representatives say that in the 10 years since local officials invited the company to work in the Keys, it has carried out "what may be one of the most proactive public-engagement efforts anywhere in the world in relation to a vector-control technology."

Whether or not the allegations of unfair politicking hold up, on the question of

'WHY DO THEY HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPERIMENT IN THE FLORIDA KEYS?'

—ED RUSSO, FLORIDA KEYS ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION





FROM LEFT: A SIGN IN KEY LARGO POINTS TOWARD A LOCAL MOSQUITO-CONTROL DISTRICT BRANCH; MOSQUITO-CONTROL WORKERS HUNT FOR BREEDING SITES; ADDING WATER TO OXITEC'S EGGS BEGINS THE HATCHING PROCESS

PREVIOUS PAGES: GETTY IMAGES; THESE PAGES, FROM LEFT: MARCO BELLO—REUTERS; JOE RAEDLE—GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OXITEC

the science of Oxitec's work, at least some of the activists' concerns lack sound footing. One anti-Oxitec billboard, for example, suggests getting bitten by one of the company's mosquitoes could cause unusual reactions. But the company is releasing only male mosquitoes, which lack the mouthparts to bite.

Still, more valid scientific criticisms abound. Jennifer Kuzma, a professor of public and international affairs at North Carolina State University, says Oxitec's technology should have been assessed by an external scientific panel during the EPA's review. "This technology is meant to, in essence, spread through the ecosystem," says Kuzma. "That … would have warranted a more rigorous and inclusive process of oversight." Oxitec representatives say the EPA typically doesn't assemble such panels for pesticidal products. Moreover, some experts say Oxitec's technology has a smaller ecological footprint than pesticides, which can harm beneficial insect populations. "This mosquito is an invasive species," says Anthony James, a professor of microbiology at the University of California, Irvine. "Any effort to get it out of the environment is not likely to have a significant ecological impact."

Dr. John Norris, chief of staff at the Lower Keys Medical Center, a hospital in Key West, worries that feeding mosquitoes an antibiotic could promote the growth of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Three outside specialists contacted by TIME were split on the merit of Norris' concern. Oxitec representatives say that the eggs that hatch in the U.S. never come into contact with the antibiotic, and that the EPA looked into the potential issue and found there was no risk.

Finally, Jeffrey Powell, an evolutionary biologist at Yale University who studies mosquito genetics, argues that whatever the other environmental and health concerns, Oxitec's technology basically doesn't work. Powell shared with TIME data from a 2013–2015 Oxitec trial in Brazil, which he says show the males' effectiveness decreased after about a year and a half, because, he argues, females were beginning to stop mating with Oxitec's modified males. Asked if this sort of issue may be of concern, Frandsen, the company CEO, offered a one-word response: "No." Oxitec representatives later added that Powell's assertion contradicts published data on the project, which show that mosquito populations remained suppressed for weeks—several mosquito life cycles—after the company's releases stopped.

THE NIGHT BEFORE Oxitec announced the start of its Florida project, tourists filled bars and restaurants in downtown Key West, the buoyant atmosphere offering little hint at the momentous genetic experiment that was about to begin just a few miles away. Yet some locals aware of the project were still nursing a lingering sense of injustice. "Why do they have the right to experiment in the Florida Keys?" says Russo. "If they can do that, then I don't know—I live in a different country … You be the judge. Is that the world you want to live in?" Oxitec's opponents aren't giving up; some are considering lawsuits. "Even if we lost this battle, and we'll have this sh-t in our environment, I still want to f-ck them up," says Daly.

Worldwide, mosquitoes and the diseases they transmit aren't giving up either, and there is no question that we need solutions. You're unlikely to be the target of an *Aedes aegypti* in New York City's Times Square or Chicago's Millennium Park today, but in 2050, you just might find yourself brushing one off your shoulder as climate change extends their range. And as local opponents contemplate their next move, Oxitec's vision of the future is beginning to crawl out of boxes across the Keys. If the company succeeds there, its genetically modified mosquitoes would be one step closer to finding their way across the U.S. and the world, potentially becoming a key weapon in the global fight against mosquito-borne disease. "I just want to demonstrate the effectiveness of this technology," says Frandsen. "We were given a shot. I want to prove it." ◻

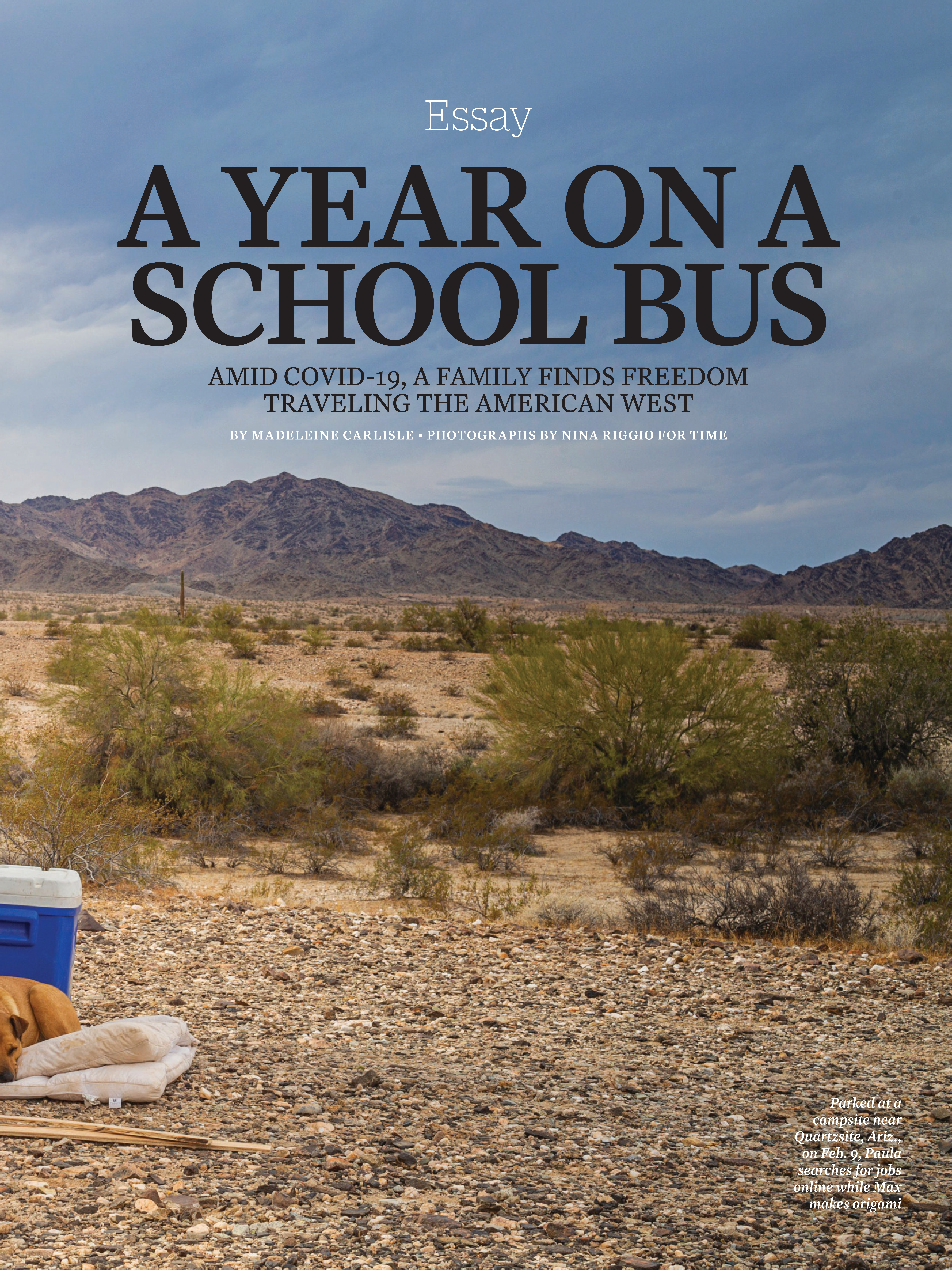

Thomas

Essay

A YEAR ON A SCHOOL BUS

AMID COVID-19, A FAMILY FINDS FREEDOM TRAVELING THE AMERICAN WEST

BY MADELEINE CARLISLE • PHOTOGRAPHS BY NINA RIGGIO FOR TIME



Parked at a campsite near Quartzsite, Ariz., on Feb. 9, Paula searches for jobs online while Max makes origami

P

PAULA WAKES UP IN HER BUS AROUND 4:30 A.M. most days. She can often still see stars. She works for a few hours, mainly on freelance projects, and makes breakfast for her 12-year-old son Max. (TIME has agreed to grant Paula and Max pseudonyms out of concern for their safety.) She feeds their dog and cat, and then she and Max, who is on the autism spectrum, begin homeschooling. They follow skills-based lesson plans that keep his work short and consistent—at least two to three hours a day, seven days a week. By 10 a.m., they usually "hit the ground running" on renovating their bus; they've already installed beds and closets, solar electricity, a kitchen with a stove, countertops and a fridge, and a tiled bathroom with a toilet and a hot shower.

Paula, 39, and Max have lived in their 35-ft. skoolie (a term for school buses that have been renovated into small mobile homes) for roughly a year, often traveling across public Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land in Arizona, California, Nevada and Utah. BLM land—much of which is in the American West—makes up one-tenth of the U.S., and huge portions are available for dispersed camping, or camping away from developed recreation facilities. People can disperse-camp for up to two weeks at a time for free, or pay to stay at most campgrounds for just as long.

The number of people living in converted vehicles has grown in recent years, and ticked up during the COVID-19 pandemic. The skoolie lifestyle can allow people to live more sustainably and affordably and with greater flexibility; the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that in 2019 more than 140,000 people were living out of vans, recreational vehicles or boats—a 38% increase from three years earlier. In 2020, dispersed camping on public land also "increased significantly," a BLM spokesperson tells TIME.

Paula and Max made the move for several reasons. Skyrocketing rent compounded by recent wildfires—which have displaced Paula and Max twice over the past five years—made finding housing where they lived in Washington State near impossible, she says. She also felt Max's school system was not addressing his needs. So when the pandemic hit and Paula lost several jobs, it was the last straw. "I made this decision because I felt like it was proactive," she says. "This gives me homeownership. This gives me freedom … This is an empowering decision.

"A lot of [people] are trying to stay out of public















Paula says that in her experience, people living out of vehicles are usually the most respectful toward the land. "The people who stay and do full-time living, they would like to keep the privilege," she says. "[We're] usually the ones that go out and clean up after all of the people that leave stuff behind."





systems," Paula says. "Including myself." But, she stresses, many people choose the lifestyle because they love its focus on travel and adventure. Paula says she's also met people who moved into skoolies after environmental disasters destroyed their homes, or are retired and want to stretch a fixed income.

Arshlynne Aketch, 25, bought and renovated an orange 1972 Ford Econoline after she lost her job in Los Angeles and was unable to pay rent, she says. She's now lived out of the van, nicknamed Creamsicle, on BLM land for more than three months. Brianna Kirk, a 20-year-old college student, moved into her 32-ft. school bus last spring and has continued her studies online. "When you live small like this," she says, "it opens up a world of experiences and gives you freedom to do really whatever you want."

And Tiffany Fede, 41, moved into a skoolie with her young son last November after her husband passed away. "I wanted it to be just us," she says. "I wanted to take this time to get to know each other." But in their travels across public land, Fede says they've also found "a big, beautiful community."

"You don't know what you can do until you're faced with a challenge," Paula says, "and then you have to do it."

This community has brought out a new side to Max, Paula says. "He's very much a tactile and experiential learner," she continues. "There's so much to do, so many places to go, different people to talk to." Retired teachers have helped with his schooling; others they've met have taught him leatherwork, carpentry and spearfishing.

At the Craggy Wash BLM campground in Lake Havasu City, Ariz., where Paula and Max traveled in February, groups helped one another build out their rigs and organized a socially distanced pig roast. One night they watched the Oscar-winning *Nomadland,* starring Frances McDormand as a woman living out of her van. ("It is not like that for us," Paula says of the film's pervasive melancholia.)

Paula and Max won't stay on BLM land forever. But for now, they're comfortable. "I can live on the amount of money that I can bring in. I'm not worried about where we're going to live tomorrow," she says.

In March, they drove through the area of California where they first began living in the skoolie. Paula was overcome with emotion, she says, remembering their first night in the bus, and the fear she felt around the massive lifestyle change ahead of them.

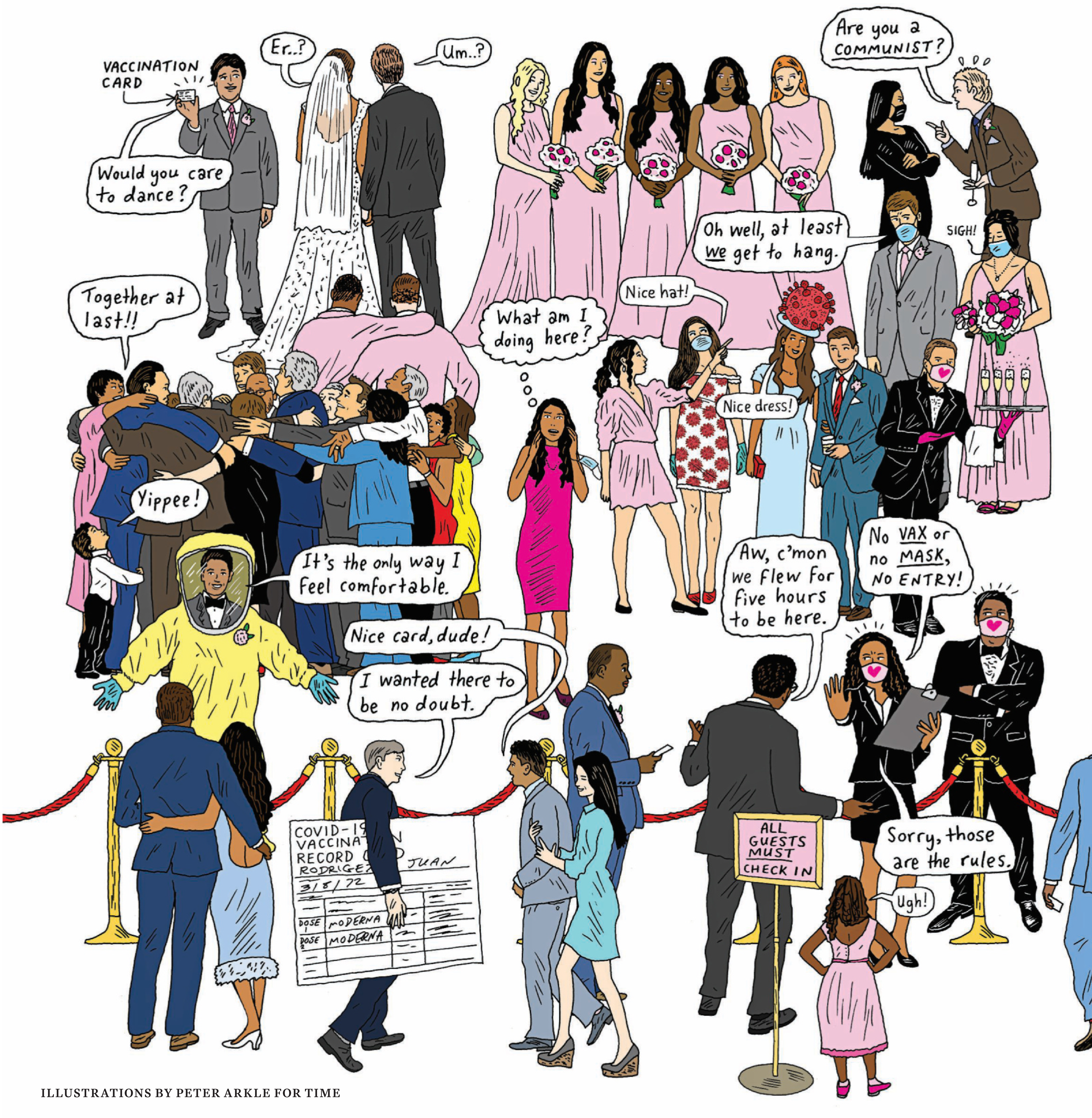
"I just sat there and was like, I can't believe that I did this," she says. "I cannot believe how far I've come." She says she realized a part of her—the more fearful part—was gone, and she cried for a long time. And then she took a shower, made dinner and sat outside with her son, watching the sun dip below the horizon.

This story was supported by the nonprofit Economic Hardship Reporting Project

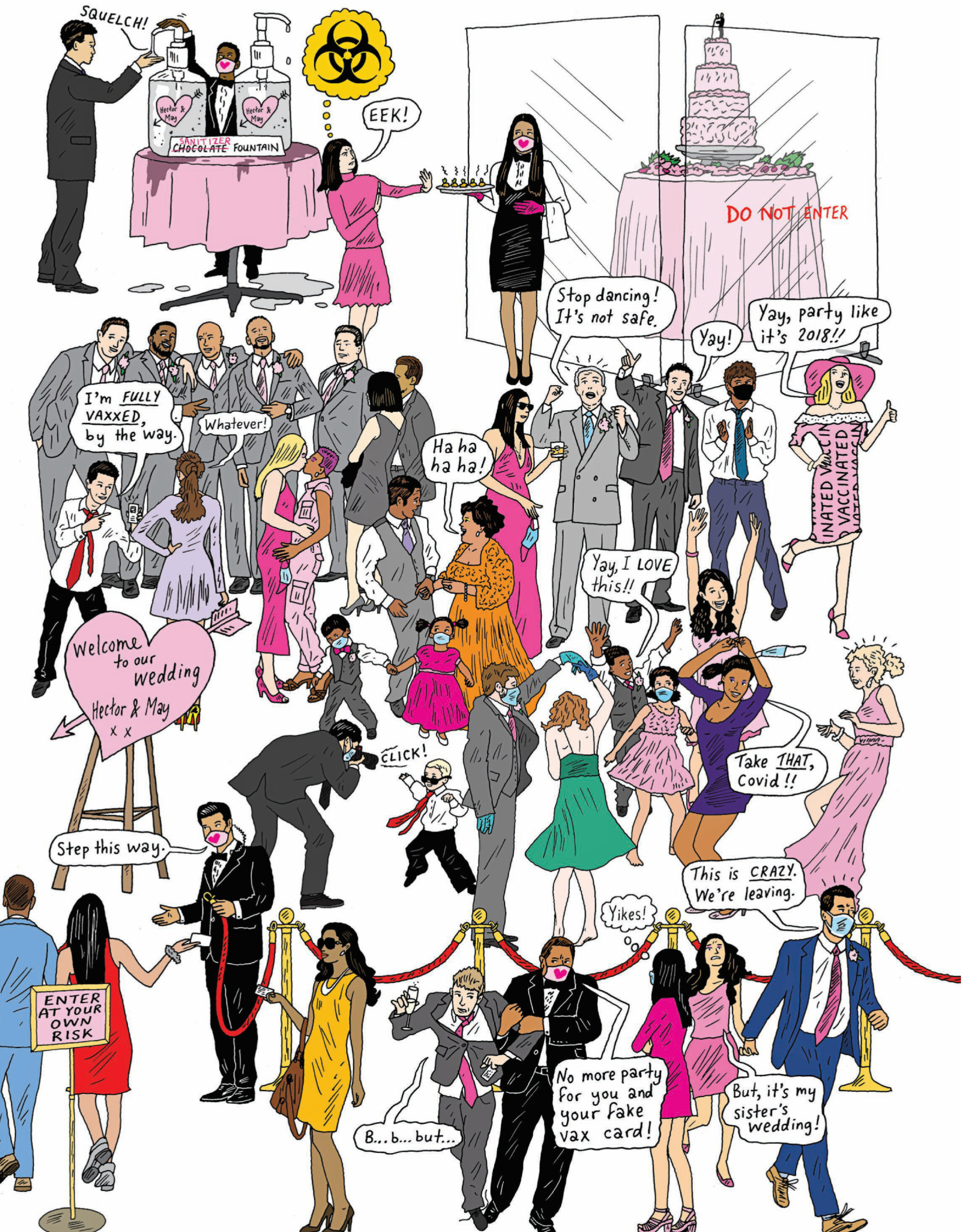
READY TO COMMIT?

ALWAYS HIGH-STRESS AFFAIRS, WEDDINGS ARE NOW TESTING OUR WILLINGNESS TO STEP BACK INTO SOCIETY

BY ELIANA DOCKTERMAN



ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETER ARKLE FOR TIME


SQUELCH!
Hector & May
Hector & May
SANITIZER
CHOCOLATE FOUNTAIN
EEK!
DO NOT ENTER
Stop dancing! It's not safe.
Yay!
Yay, party like it's 2018!!
VACCINATED
I'm FULLY VAXXED, by the way.
Whatever!
Ha ha ha ha!
Yay, I LOVE this!!
Welcome to our wedding
Hector & May
x x
CLICK!
Take THAT, Covid!!
Step this way.
This is CRAZY. We're leaving.
Yikes!
ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK
No more party for you and your fake vax card!
But, it's my sister's wedding!
B... b... but...

I WAS SUPPOSED TO GET MARRIED IN SEPTEMBER 2020.

Well, technically, as my husband would be quick to correct me, I did get legally married in September 2020 in the courtyard of our New York City apartment building in front of our parents, a handful of friends who lived nearby and a naked guy standing in the window of the building next door, who, I am told, cheered when we recessed. The 13 people in attendance wore masks I'd ordered with our wedding date printed on them, sat in distanced lawn chairs and sipped gazpacho I'd blended and individually bottled that morning in a frenzy of health-safety panic.

This was not the wedding of 220 people that we had originally planned. A few months into the pandemic, we made the call to delay our big celebration until 2021. We were hardly alone. In a typical year, Americans throw 2 million weddings, according to wedding website the Knot. Last year, about 1 million couples in the U.S. postponed their nuptials, canceled them altogether or, like us, had a legal ceremony and delayed the reception. The wedding industry as a whole saw a 34% decline in revenue, according to an IBIS World report—the drop likely would have been bigger, but many couples who rescheduled their weddings had to pay to keep their venues and vendors for an extra year.

Now, as vaccines become readily available in the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention loosens restrictions on large gatherings and Americans become increasingly bored with their empty social calendars, a glut of weddings is coming. The long-dormant wedding-party text chains have started pinging again. The wedding-planning influencers I follow on Instagram have started posting videos of guests in tuxes and gowns getting antigen tests or showing their vaccine cards. "We expect a 20% to 25% increase in weddings this year and into 2022, and we think about 47% of those 2021 weddings will be happening between July and October," says Lauren Kay, executive editor of the Knot Worldwide (who happens to be a family friend). "We believe it's going to be the biggest wedding year ever."

When you combine the couples who delayed their 2020 weddings or receptions, those who had already planned to get married in 2021 and those who got engaged during the pandemic and scheduled new events, it's unsurprising that there was a *Hunger Games*–esque rush for 2021 weekends. By the time my now husband and I tried to reschedule, every summer weekend and most summer weekdays were gone. The venue offered us the only remaining 2021 weekends: one in April and one in November. We chose the latter, hoping that date would give us a better chance of not postponing again. When we looked into renting heaters in case our reception had to take place outside, we found they were already hard to come by for 2021 fall and winter festivities.

Weddings have always been high-stress events. Now they're coming at a time when every choice can feel fraught. For millions of Americans, weddings will be the first gatherings at which they will be surrounded by dozens—even hundreds—of people after a year of relative isolation. Deciding to attend likely means committing to interactions with strangers whose health status and adherence to guidelines you may not know. It could mean booking airfare and accommodations with little idea of how things will look when the big day finally arrives. While many individuals would like to tiptoe back into normality, doing what they feel comfortable within their own circles when they're ready, weddings have no patience for such caution. They have a set date, and they need an answer: Are you coming or not?

LIKE ME, KARI POST got legally married last year. Her mother was diagnosed with cancer 10 days before Post's intended wedding date, meaning she was immunocompromised in the midst of a pandemic. Post and her fiancé decided to reschedule their party for 2021 and hold a small ceremony in May 2020, with only a few friends and family members present and everyone distanced. "This sounds bad, but parts were disappointing," she says. "My husband has pictures with his parents where they're standing like soldiers. They're so stiff. It sucks to get married when you can't hug anyone. I wanted a day when we could actually celebrate and feel safe to relax."

The couple is planning a June 2021 wedding in New Hampshire, and trying to do so in the safest way possible, starting with a clear requirement: all guests must be vaccinated. Though Post has not asked for photos of vaccine cards, she's keeping tabs on her guests through a color-coded spreadsheet that she updates every time a friend texts her that they got their shot or posts their Band-Aid photo on social media. "I could tell you the exact date of their first and second doses," she says. For a while she was texting friends every time their state expanded eligibility. Now she's just hoping to impart a sense of urgency: "One of my husband's friends just hasn't gotten around to scheduling his yet. And I want to be like, 'Oh my God, what are you doing? Just schedule the damn appointment.'"

She thinks most guests will comply, but across the U.S., only 61% of adults have received their first dose, and experts say the country will likely never reach herd immunity. "If there was anyone on our



guest list who was offended by us asking them to be vaccinated so that they could enjoy an event where our high-risk parents would be, and they somehow felt that their freedom of choice was more important than our parents being able to be at our wedding and enjoy themselves safely, I have no interest in maintaining that friendship," says Post. "You don't like our rules, don't come. Totally fine. We will rent less chairs and order less food."

After Tamra Van Hausen and Matthew Feige, who are getting married in August in Asheville, N.C., wrote on their invitation that all adults must be vaccinated, Feige's father, Herb Feige, let them know he was opting out of the shot and therefore the party. "I still have a lot of questions," he says, noting that we don't know yet how long shots will be effective and whether we'll need boosters. "When my son insisted everyone be vaccinated, I wasn't going to go against his word."

His presence was so meaningful to the couple that they considered changing their rules but ultimately decided to keep the original plan in place. Feige, they agreed, would attend the outdoor ceremony but not the indoor reception. "And that hurt," Van Hausen told me shortly after her fiancé's initial conversation with his father. "But also I could not live with myself if someone got sick. I have grappled with the idea of making people come to a party that is all about me and risking themselves in some way. And that really freaks me out still."

25%

Potential spike in the number of weddings in 2021, compared with a typical year

Landis Bejar, a licensed mental health counselor, says such anxiety is now common. She founded AisleTalk, a company that specializes in counseling couples as they plan their weddings, in 2018. She saw a 33% uptick in business from 2019 to 2020 and is on track to see an additional 25% bump this year, which she attributes in part to the pandemic sabotaging people's wedding plans. Many of her patients are struggling to accept the fact that anyone who attends their wedding is consenting to some degree of risk. "There are no 100% guarantees," she says. "Our job is to ask our clients, 'If you put all these precautions in place, can you live with whatever uncertainty is remaining?' We have a lot of people who identify as perfectionists, so this idea that they can't guarantee that everyone will be perfectly safe causes a lot of guilt and anxiety."

Herb Feige changed his mind about getting vaccinated. "I'm 80 years old, and now that the mask mandate is off, I'm not sure who is vaccinated and who is not," he says. "I wanted to be able to protect myself." He will be able to attend all the events at his son's wedding. But many couples still harbor fears about their guests' susceptibility to the virus. Several I spoke to mentioned a 55-person wedding in Maine last August that turned into a superspreader event: 177 COVID-19 cases were linked to the nuptials, and seven people died, none of whom actually attended the wedding.

Brides and grooms have been forced to become amateur public-health prognosticators. Until recently the CDC had recommended that vaccinated people continue to wear masks indoors in most settings. Then on May 13, it announced that vaccinated people could shed their masks, indoors and out, with a few exceptions, like at hospitals and airports. Some prominent epidemiologists pushed back, pointing out that it's impossible for businesses to discern who is vaccinated and who is not. A New York *Times* survey of 570 epidemiologists, conducted in the two weeks before the CDC announcement, found that 81% expected Americans to need masks indoors for at least a year with people whose vaccination status they don't know.

And state regulations for weddings are ever-changing and often inscrutable. As of publication of this piece, New York caps indoor weddings at 250 people (including vendors) and mandates 6 ft. of distancing unless the couple requires proof of vaccination or a recent negative COVID-19 test from guests. California employs a tiered system based on case counts, which means a couple in one county might be able to host four times the number of guests as a couple in the next county. D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser banned dancing at weddings, prompting a bride-to-be to file a lawsuit against the mayor in May. (Though that moratorium may sound like a grim rule torn from *Footloose,* the U.K. government

SOURCE: THE KNOT

has also advised against dancing at parties.)

Many questions facing those planning weddings are less about the science and regulations and more about how quickly we all get over the ick factor of partying in close proximity to other people: Will guests feel comfortable nibbling on passed hors d'oeuvres? Can you seat strangers at the same table? What if the adults are vaccinated but their young children are not? Will people really want to crowd together on a dance floor? Do you require those who are not vaccinated to wear masks? Meanwhile, unless guests talk through their every concern with the engaged couple, they must decide whether to RSVP yes with at least some questions unanswered.

Of course not every attendee brings the same degree of worry. Jamie Sanderson recalls being one of a few guests wearing a mask at a relative's September 2020 wedding, where she says two different people asked her if she was a communist. She left before dinner. "I couldn't do it," she says. "It was another peak of COVID in Florida where we never really cared about COVID in the first place, apparently."

One way for couples to skirt these issues would be to delay their weddings another year, but that's not an option for everyone. Many brides and grooms have sunk a significant amount of money into rescheduling their events. And, as Post points out, the timing matters for those hoping to start a family. "We put off trying to conceive because I didn't want to be nine months pregnant at our wedding or three months postpartum and leaking on my dress," she says. "That's hard for us because I'm 35. The narrow window became even narrower."

47%

Percentage of couples who had planned to get married in 2020 but postponed their reception or their entire wedding

COUPLES HAVE BEGUN TO EXPRESS what Bejar calls "postponement fatigue," the inability to get excited about a wedding date because of the fear they'll have to reschedule and replan for a second, third or even fourth time. "It just feels like it could be taken away from them at any moment," she says. Post concedes that she'll be relieved when her wedding is over: "It's a horrible thing to say about your wedding, but there's so much anticipation and planning and disappointment and what-if, and eventually I feel like there's just going to be comfort in getting to the point of, 'It's past. It's done.'"

The good news for brides and grooms is there's an end point to the decisionmaking. The bad news for guests—a group not mutually exclusive from the brides and grooms, especially those of a certain age who find themselves on the wedding circuit—is there may not be, at least not for a while. The flood of 2021 weddings means that many people will have to run through their cost-benefit analyses again and again. And for those who are in their loved ones' wedding parties, as Sanderson was for the September wedding, the events multiply: bachelor and bachelorette parties, shopping for the bride's dress, showers, envelope-stuffing parties.

Sometime in March, when the first of my friends began to get vaccinated, a friend's maid of honor sent a group text: "Would people feel comfortable attending a May bachelorette?" I opened Instagram to investigate the other invitees. How social had they been during those months I spent secluded in my apartment interacting only with my husband? Was that girl drinking martinis maskless in a bar or her own home? It took me hours to work up the courage to say I'd really rather know that everyone was vaccinated first. It took me another several weeks to politely say I felt comfortable attending outdoor events but not indoor ones. The issue would come up again with a bridal shower, another wedding reception to be held indoors, and in trying to plan my own bachelorette party.

Those who say no to events can feel as if they failed their friends. Chris Banker decided not to attend his friend's wedding in January because of health risks, a particularly agonizing decision considering the same friend will be the best man at Banker's wedding in October. The wedding was in New Hampshire, so indoors was the only option at that time of year. "If I'm being completely honest, it was a long conversation that kind of went over multiple days with my fiancée and I talking about the pros and cons. Obviously we wanted to be there. But at that point, there was still a lot unknown about how this thing was kind of exploding in terms of the winter surge," he says. "You always talk about that moment, being there for your buddy when he's getting married. I think we made the right decision given the information we had at the time, but that day I felt awful." His friend was extremely understanding, he says, "but it was the toughest part of the pandemic for me."

It's not just health concerns that may deter guests from attending wedding-related events. At a time of massive unemployment, there's also the question of money. Sanderson's husband lost his job at the beginning of the pandemic and spent six months without a regular source of income. When it came time to buy a bridesmaid dress for her relative's ceremony, Sanderson had to broach an awkward topic: "I told her I'm not buying a $200 dress from David's Bridal. I'm sorry. I love you. But we've drained our savings. We've maxed out our credit cards."

On average, it cost $430 to attend a wedding in 2019, according to the Knot. That number jumped to $1,440 for weddings that required air travel. And Wedding Wire estimates it costs an additional $1,200 for bridesmaid dresses, groomsmen suits, bachelor and bachelorette parties, and other events if you're in the wedding party. "I wouldn't travel for a wedding right now," Sanderson says. "That's way outside of our budget because we were hit so hard for the first six months. That killed us, literally took all of our money."



SPEND ANY TIME perusing the comments on wedding sites, and you will find plenty of couples outraged at a friend who is skipping their wedding for safety reasons and many guests who consider being asked about their vaccination status rude. Bejar suggests that these people are outliers. "At least one client was able to say, 'One of the silver linings is I have more understanding if people say they can't come. It could be psychologically that they're not ready. It could be medically. It could be financially,'" she says. "People have been through a lot this year, and the RSVPs might not look the way we anticipated. But there's a lot of grace and understanding."

After all, we're all a little traumatized. Psychiatrists have dubbed fears of returning to normal life "re-entry anxiety," and the American Psychological Association reports that about half of all Americans feel anxious about resuming in-person, indoor interactions. Sheehan D. Fisher, an assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Northwestern University, says that "we have been taught to avoid large groups. They signal danger. And danger provokes fear and anxiety." He equates going from quarantine life to attending a 200-person wedding to being "thrown into the deep end of the pool."

Fisher has been advising his patients to take small steps to overcome their fears: a meal with friends, perhaps, followed by a small group gathering. "It's almost like minor exposure therapy," he says. "The good thing is that humans adjust relatively quickly. As things start opening up, people will get comfortable at the new level."

$430

Average cost of attending a wedding in 2019. The number goes up to $1,440 for weddings requiring air travel

For now we're in limbo. Couples have tried to find creative ways to put everyone at ease. Several weddings have gone viral for offering guests red, yellow and green wristbands. Red tells other guests to keep 6 ft. of distance and masks on; yellow means an elbow bump is O.K.; green signals hugs are welcome. Bejar and Fisher note that thoughtful touches like this spare the guests the emotional strain of having to set boundaries with each new person they encounter.

And guests, Fisher says, need to exercise empathy too. "It's helpful to think about what you want to accomplish. For a wedding, you're there to support the couple," he says. "What is the true value of what you are doing? That's the carrot that will draw you toward 'O.K., it's worth it for me to feel some level of anxiety and try to adjust because I'm here for a larger purpose,' rather than thinking, 'I'm here because I *have* to socialize.'"

By the time I get married (again), my husband and I will have celebrated our first anniversary. Looking back at photos from our legal ceremony, I'm drawn to a black-and-white snapshot of our friends, a married couple sitting alone on a bench. They're isolated, and the way the picture is shot, darkness is creeping in on them. They're dressed for a formal event, masks on, staring straight at the camera. They're surrounded by hand sanitizer, water bottles with their names printed on them, and other trinkets that will, when our children one day look at our wedding album, signal that 2020 was a strange and difficult year, but we threw a tiny party anyway.

Now, as we plan for November, I remain skeptical that we'll be able to gather hundreds of people together. Maybe it's my "postponement fatigue" talking, but I worry another variant will emerge that will once again make our reception an act of irresponsibility. I try to devise backup plans based on unknowable factors—whether young children will be vaccinated by then, whether it will rain that weekend, forcing us to move certain festivities inside—and I wonder if it will all be for naught. But with each passing day, I grow more optimistic. In June, I'll attend a friend's wedding taking place in an open tent. I'll see one of my own bridesmaids for the first time in more than a year. I have to admit that I'm excited.

"I am hopeful, in a way, that this is the beginning of the end of the bad thing," Post tells me, "and that it's that chance for people to be like, O.K., life can go on. We can celebrate again. There are things to look forward to." ◻





NEXT GENERATION LEADERS

Trendsetters and trailblazers who are guiding the way to a brighter future



NIGERIA / 33

AKWAEKE EMEZI

WRITING NEW POSSIBILITIES INTO BEING

By Tre'vell Anderson

AKWAEKE EMEZI HAS TAKEN OFF THEIR MASKS—the ones we all wear that grin and lie, as poet Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote. The ones that hide and shade more than our cheeks and eyes, camouflaging the traumas we've triumphed over. The masks we don to survive a white-supremacist world that simply can't hold our Black, queer, trans and godly brilliance.

The Nigeria-born, best-selling author of the critically acclaimed *Freshwater, PET* and *The Death of Vivek Oji* is simply no longer interested in projecting false versions of themself—even if disengaging with such a survival mechanism comes with costs. After all, true liberation is priceless.

"Just to be able to talk to my own people is freedom," Emezi says on a recent morning via Zoom, describing the ways writing for white audiences, or rather a publishing industry that centers white readers, is the exact opposite. As a Black author who's always expressly desired to write for Black people, they're at a moment in their career where being their most unapologetic and authentic self is not only possible, but also paramount. "I understand all the limitations that are put on us just by existing in this world, by trying to create work in this world, and I'm saying: To hell with that."

That's where their latest book, *Dear Senthuran: A Black Spirit Memoir,* comes in. The viscerally intimate chronicling of Emezi's lived experience, out June 8, serves as a manifesto marking a shift in their career away from the all-consuming white gaze toward a perspective that is Blacker and more beautiful.

"I'm going to write this as if it's just us," they recall telling themself about the memoir, "because in my reality, in my world and in a world where we are free, it is just us."

EMEZI, WHO TURNS 34 on June 6, has been worldbuilding since childhood. Growing up in Aba, a commercial town in the south of Nigeria, they were a voracious reader and writer from an early age. They credit such an appetite to the piles of books they had access to, some purchased secondhand at the local post office, some shipped from cousins in London and others found on their parents' bookshelves. "While the town was burning from the riots," they write in *Dear Senthuran* about life under military dictatorship in the '90s, "my sister and I believed in invisible fairies, pixies hiding in our backyard."

'My job in the revolution is as a storyteller.'

When they moved to the U.S. at 16, having read everyone from Chinua Achebe to Daphne du Maurier, Emezi was treated as exceptional by white folks. "The white dean of my school kept introducing me as the 16-year-old freshman from West Africa who'd already read Dickens and Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, as if any of that was surprising or special," they write. But going from a town in Nigeria, where they knew only two or three white people during their entire childhood, to Appalachia, where white people are decidedly the majority, they learned to wear one of their first masks.

"I learned really fast, especially because we were in the South, how to be adorable, how to smile and be really charming [so] that the white people will give you everything," they say.

Experiencing that in adolescence primed them, somewhat, for the earlier stages of their literary career. Take their 2018 debut, *Freshwater,* a meditation on metaphysical identity inspired by Emezi's own life. About a Nigerian girl who, having been born with one foot in the spiritual realm, develops separate selves as she matures, the novel is an accounting of a contemporary *ogbanje,* a traditional Igbo term that describes a type of trickster spirit born into a human body. Described by Emezi as "technically a memoir" that reflects their own life as an *ogbanje, Freshwater* was marketed as an "autobiographical novel," a genre then rising in popularity that Emezi used to make their life more palatable to publishers and readers unfamiliar with Igbo ontology. They figured, as a writer unpublished in the U.S. (they were previously published in the U.K.), that the book would sell easier if readers weren't asked to accept its story as truth. "I'll put a mask on this one," they remember thinking. "And it worked."

Freshwater was an instant hit, going into its third printing before its publication date because of early buzz, and becoming a New York *Times* Notable Book for 2018 and a finalist for many honors. Its success made possible the deals Emezi later signed for 2019's *PET,* a young-adult novel that centers a Black trans girl and that became a National Book Award finalist, and last year's *The Death of Vivek Oji,* an immediate New York *Times* best seller that details what it means for a family to lose a child they never really knew.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ELLIOTT JEROME BROWN JR. FOR TIME

By almost every measure, Emezi has been living a life other writers only dream of. With *Dear Senthuran,* however, they're setting the record straight, revealing the depths of depression and anxiety that led to attempts to end their life that happened alongside what they also describe as the "brilliant" blossoming of their career.

FRANK AND FLAT-FOOTED, like a soul singer who commands attention without backup dancers and light shows, *Dear Senthuran* builds upon the narrative of life as an *ogbanje* first introduced in *Freshwater.* This time, however, there are no masks. Emezi is refreshingly uninhibited in laying bare the truth of their life as an embodied spirit. They recount everything from their Nigerian upbringing and ongoing issues with their parents to discovering and accepting their innate divinity; from the "bridge across realities" of their gender journey to specifics of their publishing career, including the advances they got for each book and what they stand to make from FX's series adaptation of *Freshwater.* The memoir, the first draft of which they finished in December 2019, reflects, as Emezi writes, "the unfolding of a self," one that once binded, tucked and doubled over into itself to be more legible to others, into the glorious beast they were called to be. *Dear Senthuran* is a brutally honest and vulnerable testimony of survival, of the rejuvenating variety that inspires and activates; if it had a soundtrack, the timeless Clara Ward gospel hymn "How I Got Over" might be on loop.

"The first words that come to mind are *terrifying* and *lonely,*" Emezi responds when asked about the process of unfolding into, or standing in, their power, because "unfolding comes with costs." Such sacrifices might include falling out of one's relationship with family or becoming a pariah when one starts taking up for themselves. They use a saying popular in Trinidadian communities that recognizes the sacrifices necessary for liberation: "Yuh cyah play mas if yuh fraid powder."

"That's something that I try to remind myself of a lot, that there are costs to unfolding and everyone decides for themselves, is the cost worth it?" they say. The more Emezi unfolds into the truest parts of themself, the more they'll have to lose and the greater hurt they'll have to process. Eventually, though, the greater gains they'll enjoy, too.

Central to Emezi's standing in their power has been reifying a mantra writer Toni Morrison once espoused. While discussing the massive audience her literary works had attracted in a 1998 interview with journalist Jana Wendt, Morrison said, "I stood at the border, stood at the edge and claimed it as central, claimed it as central and let the rest of the world move over to where I was." *Dear Senthuran* is Emezi standing at their center.

The book's subtitle, *A Black Spirit Memoir,* was their attempt to ensure that it would not be sold as anything other than what it was. Each chapter is a letter, written to members of Emezi's chosen family. "I wanted the letters to hold me accountable," they say, referring to their goal of writing for a Black audience. "I am speaking in the most intimate language I have," which helps them avoid the code switching and explanatory commas they might've once used to ensure "outsiders" could understand.

In writing the book, Emezi says, they wanted to do the opposite of what they learned many years ago in order to traverse white spaces they find themself in. "It was like a survival mask that I put on, where if I seemed harmless then I wouldn't be hurt or be crushed by the innate white supremacy in all these people," they say they once thought. But one can't ever charm their way out of the consequences of white supremacy; the system itself must be dismantled.

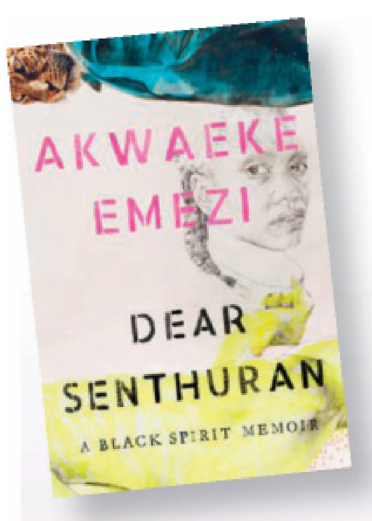
SINCE EMEZI'S DEBUT, words like *visionary, radical* and *innovative* have been used to describe their work. Perhaps all of these descriptors are true, but Emezi doesn't see themself necessarily as a leader. Rather, they say they're a conduit for a collective imagination they make tangible.

"My work is just channeling something that other people gifted me," they say. For example, they credit the setting for their novel *PET*—a world without prisons and police—to social-justice organizers and prison abolitionists. "My job in the revolution is as a storyteller, to take those possibilities and shape them into stories [that] disseminate."

Amplifier, then, is a more apt label for their brilliance, Emezi says, one that requires them "to climb as high as possible and be as bright as possible" so the realities and possibilities they're amplifying can reach the masses. And they're set to continue doing this work for the foreseeable future, with two other books slated for release in 2022: a poetry collection titled *Content Warning: Everything* and a romance novel titled *You Made a Fool of Death With Your Beauty,* the screen rights of which went for a reported seven figures to Amazon Studios with Michael B. Jordan's production company, Outlier Society, attached.

"It's like a spell of possibility we spread," they say—the possibility of a world better than the one we have. "The more people that believe, the stronger that reality becomes. And our goal is to make that a reality that holds as many people as possible, because the realities we're living in now, they're not holding us. They're trying to kill us." Emezi's taking off their mask, then, is also a fight for life, a foreshadowing of a promised land on the horizon.

Anderson is a freelance entertainment and culture journalist and co-host of the podcast FANTI



A new center

In a letter to readers, Emezi writes about reaching people not often catered to by publishers. "This book will be a mirror to more people than this industry can imagine."

IZA: MARCELO CORREIA—REDUX; MOUSSALLAM: STEFAN WALTER—COURTESY ROLEX



BRAZIL / 30

IZA

Fighting injustice through music

BY JENNA CALDWELL

Iza is at home in Rio de Janeiro, talking about Beyoncé. The Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter, born Isabela Cristina Correia de Lima Lima, is recalling doing the Portuguese dub of Beyoncé's Nala in 2019's *The Lion King.* "To be a part of something Beyoncé is part of is a dream," she says. It's a fitting subject for the superstar some have dubbed the Brazilian Beyoncé.

Though she released her first album, *Dona de Mim,* in 2018, Iza's rise began a few years earlier. After leaving a career in advertising at 25, she began to upload song covers to YouTube—where her videos have since garnered nearly a billion views for rhythmic hits like "Brisa" and "Pesadão." She's collaborated with A-listers like Timbaland, Major Lazer and Ciara.

But reaching this level was no easy feat. Growing up, Iza didn't see Black women like herself reflected in Brazilian media. Historically, Afro-Brazilians have faced racism, colorism and featurism, creating barriers in her industry. Now, she's keenly aware that she's the representation she sought as a child. "My responsibility is [heavy]," she says. Her songs and videos bring awareness to injustice, like the video for "Dona de Mim," which showcases the struggles of everyday Black women.

In May 2020, after the police killing of 14-year-old João Pedro Matos Pinto drew comparisons to the murder of George Floyd, protesters took to the streets. Amid the demonstrations, Iza urged her 14 million Instagram followers to support an antiracist manifesto, and highlighted the work of Afro-Brazilian activists and academics. "I don't talk about racism because it's a subject I'm fond of," she explains. "I talk about it because it's necessary."

Iza is symbolic of the new era she's fighting for: a global cultural embrace of not only Afro-Latino artists but of people and their humanity. "Our microphone is a weapon, and it needs to be used," she says.

FRANCE / 33

YVES MOUSSALLAM

DEEPENING CLIMATE KNOWLEDGE

By Ciara Nugent

AS A TEENAGER, YVES MOUSSALLAM TRAVELED FROM the Paris suburbs to the Alps a few times a year to climb mountains. Now, though, he prefers volcanoes. "When you get to visit one that's entering an eruption, the whole way up you can feel the ground shaking," the 33-year-old French-Lebanese volcanologist says. "You're excited but a little scared too. It's exhilarating."

Moussallam, who earned a Ph.D. in volcanology from the University of Cambridge in 2015, researches how volcanic activity influences the earth's climate. Volcanoes emit gases like sulfur dioxide, which form aerosols that reflect the sun's heat back out of the atmosphere, reducing the greenhouse effect. Scientists still lack data on how much of these gases volcanoes give off, compromising the scientific models essential to navigating the changing climate. Moussallam is helping fix that problem, traveling to remote volcanoes that have rarely been studied.

The pandemic put fieldwork on hold. But Moussallam has kept busy. Last year, he started setting up a lab at Columbia University, re-creating the high-pressure and high-temperature conditions in which magma forms inside the earth. And in a twist of fate, Moussallam may now be helping put an end to the expeditions he loves—he is working on a project using drones to take readings at the top of Ecuador's El Reventador volcano. If it succeeds, the technique may be used at volcanoes all over the world. "A hike that takes me five hours, a drone can do safely in 10 minutes," he says. It's a promising development for science, but sad for researchers like him. "I feel like we're the last generation of volcanologists that is going to be allowed to do these kinds of things."



UNITED STATES / 29

ANTHONY RAMOS

BREAKING THE HOLLYWOOD MOLD

By Andrew R. Chow

SITTING STILL DOESN'T COME EASY TO ANTHONY Ramos. The performer has spent his 29 years in constant motion: scrounging for dollar slices while living in Brooklyn as a kid, schlepping across America on musical-theater tours, staying up all night writing songs after eight-a-week *Hamilton* performances. "That's always where my head's at: think fast, make moves, bop bop bop bop bop," Ramos says over a Zoom call in May.

In fact, the only reason Ramos is stationary now is that he's on a 14-day quarantine in Montreal before his next project: playing the lead in the next *Transformers* movie. While confined to his Airbnb, he's already scheming about how to reshape a franchise driven largely by explosions, putting final touches on his second pop-R&B album and envisioning the concert tour to follow.

But before any of that happens, Ramos will be introduced to millions when *In the Heights* premieres in theaters and on HBO Max on June 11. The film, directed by Jon M. Chu and adapted from Lin-Manuel Miranda's Tony Award–winning 2008 musical about a community bursting with culture and drama in upper Manhattan, represents a full-circle moment for Ramos. It's a neighborhood story that conjures his own upbringing. It's the show that convinced him he had a place in a theater world sorely lacking Latino representation. And it sees Ramos stepping into the shoes of his mentor Miranda, who was meant to play the lead role of Usnavi—a hard-luck bodega owner with dreams of returning to the Dominican Republic—a decade ago onscreen, before the film slipped into development hell. The battles Miranda and others fought in that time resulted in a moment in which a face like Ramos' can be that of a leading man—and Ramos hopes to do the same for a new generation. "That's what I'm most grateful for: to be a part of a story that opens the door for many more stories," he says.

RAMOS WAS RAISED in a Bushwick housing project by a single Puerto Rican mother of three; they sometimes lacked hot water and faced the threat of eviction. He played baseball and did high school theater before landing a full ride at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy. "I didn't even like musicals like that," he confesses. But his feelings changed when he saw *In the Heights* on Broadway in 2011. The characters talked like the people he grew up with and embraced the same blend of hip-hop, salsa, bachata and pop. Its themes of family, gentrification and hustle spoke to him like no golden-age musical had. Ramos eagerly auditioned for the national tour but was rejected. He was even further off the mark with more traditional shows: "People were like, He speaks like he's from a barrio. We don't know what to do with this guy," he says. So he took ensemble parts on grueling tours and sang on cruise ships.

Then, in 2014, he showed up to an open call for some kind of musical about Alexander Hamilton. "He had this hunger; the way he delivered the material felt very life or death for him," Miranda says. "If it weren't my show, I'd be like, 'This guy should be leading the revolution of *Les Misérables.*'" Miranda soon cast him in the dual role of John Laurens and Hamilton's son Philip, and Ramos served as one of *Hamilton*'s foremost energizers during its record-breaking Broadway run. The exposure led to roles in *A Star Is Born,* the Netflix reboot of Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It* and a recording contract with Republic Records.

> ***'I'm grateful to be a part of a story that opens the door for many more stories.'***

IN AUGUST 2019, on one of the last days of production of *In the Heights,* Chu filmed Ramos in a tiny bodega set, with Rica boxes and Jumex cans lining the walls. Despite the cramped quarters, Ramos was visibly at ease, roughhousing with other cast members between takes. "I relate to Usnavi in so many ways: growing up Latino in New York with so many dreams, but also the reality of living paycheck to paycheck," Ramos told me then.

Two years and a pandemic later, this particular dream is about to come true. *In the Heights* arrives as movie theaters stir from hibernation. While many will watch its Busby Berkeley–inspired numbers on a big screen, millions—if *Hamilton*'s Disney+ streaming numbers are any indication—will once again stream a Ramos-Miranda musical from home. Wherever they're sitting, they'll be embracing a hard-won vision of movie magic that might speak to young people like the musical first spoke to Ramos. "We know what we got is fly," Ramos says. "And I want kids of color—whether they're from India, Puerto Rico, Nigeria, wherever—to watch and be like, 'Oh, snap—that's what's up.'"

PHOTOGRAPH BY JINGYU LIN FOR TIME



NEXT
GENERATION
LEADERS

UNITED STATES / 24

KYRA CONDIE

REACHING NEW HEIGHTS

By Sean Gregory

WHEN KYRA CONDIE WAS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL, boys said a six-pack on a girl was "gross." They said she was ugly. They taunted Condie, a vegetarian, about her diet; one day, she says, they chased her from the school bus waving cold cuts. She scrambled up a tree to avoid them.

She got the last laugh. Condie, 24, will represent the U.S. at the Tokyo Olympics this summer, as sport climbing makes its debut at the Games. And she's using her elite status and social media platform to reach for more than a medal.

Growing up near St. Paul, Minn., Condie was a climber practically from birth. She'd scale her crib. Her mother Cathy shares a picture of her daughter perched on a refrigerator she had ascended; she was 4. At 10, she attended a birthday party at a climbing gym and was hooked. But not long after joining a youth team, Condie began suffering back pain. Diagnosed with severe idiopathic scoliosis, requiring surgery, she was told she might not climb again. Medical staff tried consoling her by telling her that one day she'd have a family and climbing wouldn't seem so important. "I doubt they would say that to a young male swimmer," Condie says.

She got another opinion—and recovered from surgery to reach the Olympics and become a board member of USA Climbing. In that role, she's pushing for diversity and inclusion in her sport. One seemingly easy fix she proposes: ditching the number of racist, sexist and homophobic rock-climbing route names that still persist.

A breakout Olympic performance will help Condie spread her message. To that end, she spent a mid-May morning at the USA Climbing Training Center in Salt Lake City, doing one-handed pull-ups with her fingers. She meticulously charts her progress in a notebook—YAY! CLIMBING! it says on the cover. "It is really frustrating when people say that athletes should stick to sports," she says. "I don't want to look back in 20 years and be like, 'Oh, I should have done more.'"





JESSICA TALLEY—LOUDER THAN ELEVEN



JAPAN / 32

Anna and Mizuki Nakajima

Playing their part

BY AMY GUNIA

Twin sisters Anna and Mizuki Nakajima founded their mobile-gaming company coly inc. in 2014 to solve a problem they saw with games in Japan. Too few were designed to appeal to women, and those that were featured flat story lines and unrealistic characters. “We think we’re creating human beings in a two-dimensional world, rather than two-dimensional characters that look and act like humans,” Mizuki says.

But it’s not just the narrative-driven games that are different at the Nakajimas’ company: 25% of its board members are women, and women fill more than 70% of senior management positions. About 75% of coly’s 240 staffers are women. Those numbers stand out in corporate Japan, where women hold fewer than 15% of middle and senior management roles—one of the lowest rates among the world’s large economies.

They’ve had impressive success. In February, Mizuki, the president and CEO, and Anna, the vice president, led coly to an initial public offering on the Tokyo Stock Exchange. The company’s equity value is more than $225 million.

The sisters want coly to be an example of the benefits of inclusive hiring. “We hope that more Japanese companies will place more women in management positions, because we know that they are capable,” Mizuki says.

The Nakajimas’ four games have developed a loyal community, and they believe the connection players feel will have an added effect: helping young women overcome loneliness. “We thought the key for the next generation,” says Anna, “was to come up with games that could give people hope for tomorrow.” *—With reporting by Aria Chen/Hong Kong and Mayako Shibata/Tokyo*

PHOTOGRAPH BY KENTO MORI FOR TIME



AUSTRALIA / 26

Grace Tame

Speaking up for survivors

BY BELINDA LUSCOMBE

Many people, for good reason, do not wish to be reminded of the most horrific thing that happened to them when they were young. But Grace Tame, 26, has insisted on it.

When Tame was 15, a teacher lured her into trusting him before beginning to sexually assault her regularly after school. After he was released from prison, he discussed the crimes on social media, attempting to downplay their seriousness. Tame, on the other hand, had to keep silent; regulations in Tasmania, Australia, prevented survivors of such crimes from identifying themselves. With the help of a local journalist, Tame challenged that law. The hashtag #LetHerSpeak took off, and the wave of stories it unleashed led to a re-examination of consent culture in some of Australia's most vaunted institutions. She was named Australian of the Year in 2021.

"I didn't know that it was going to blow up in the way that it has," says Tame, but she has no regrets. "I'm unflinchingly determined to continue to expose these evils at every level." She's now launching a foundation to try to prevent what happened to her from happening to others, with a focus on education about grooming, the psychological process by which people are manipulated into trusting their abusers. The resulting self-doubt can leave survivors plagued by shame, she says, and thus even more likely to stay silent.

Tame has scolded the media and the government for retraumatizing assault survivors—she declines to use the word *victims*—by requiring them to keep telling their stories. Yet she knows those stories are worth fighting to tell. "There hasn't been enough evidence from the lived-experience stories put forward yet for us to really get a clear idea of just how big this is and just how much work we have to do," she says. "But I'll do this for the rest of my life if I have to."

SOUTH AFRICA / 28

TREVOR STUURMAN

CHRONICLING A CONTINENT

By Aryn Baker

A COMPULSIVE NOMAD WHO DRAWS INSPIRATION from the people he meets on his travels, South African photographer and visual artist Trevor Stuurman, like most of the world, had his wings clipped by COVID-19. But with his habitual whirlwind schedule of fashion weeks, cover shoots and styling projects suspended, the 28-year-old film-school graduate had time to think. He knew that the next generation of creatives would benefit from access to a catalog of contemporary African culture—but, he wondered, what was the best way to record and preserve such a multifaceted subject? "We are only able to see how far we've come by looking back," he says by video call from his home in Johannesburg. "I wanted to document our lived experiences in Africa, in real time."

Then, in April, a fire ripped through the archives at the University of Cape Town, damaging an important repository of Black South African culture. The cataclysm confirmed to Stuurman that his lockdown idea was worth pursuing. The online platform he's building, due to launch in July, will be populated with music videos, art, film, writing and podcasts; he calls it the Motherland and sees it as a way to celebrate African stories from an African point of view in a way that is "fireproof, waterproof and bulletproof."

For far too long, says Stuurman, the African narrative has been hijacked by outsiders, first by colonial invaders, then by circumstances that rendered the dominant image of Africa as one of suffering. As a young photographer, he set out to counter that story, documenting first the vibrant urban styles of Johannesburg, then street fashion across the continent. "I wanted to capture African images that did not exist on Google," he says. His early work, appearing on Tumblr and Instagram, earned him accolades as well as commissions: in 2018 he photographed former U.S. President Barack Obama's visit to Kenya, then Naomi Campbell in Nigeria and Beyoncé in South Africa. His meticulously styled editorial shoots and advertising campaigns, for companies like Absolut Vodka and Mini, offer a new narrative—one where his largely African subjects are bold, powerful and clad in cutting-edge fashion by Africa's emerging designers. He uses color-saturated, pattern-filled portraits to challenge the stereotypes, he says, keeping away from animal prints and ceremonial garb. "My work is about showing what Africa looks like now," he says, "to cultivate a better understanding of what Africa is."

PHOTOGRAPH BY LISA MAREE WILLIAMS FOR TIME



That mission extends to helping others tell their stories. Having grown up poor in a small mining town, Stuurman is acutely aware of the importance of role models. He caught an early break when his street-style work earned him a nomination for South Africa's *Elle* magazine stylist of the year in 2012; that exposure brought him mentorships and contacts that he parlayed into assignments with international recognition. He worked on Beyoncé's film *Black Is King* for Disney+ and styled shoots for a cosmetics campaign linked to the recently released *Coming 2 America,* but his editorial work for British *Vogue,* he says, has been the highlight of his career, because of the opportunities that magazine has offered other Black stylists, photographers and designers. "It's very important that we have more diversity and representation [in fashion]," he says. "It shows what's possible, and it means that there's someone who has a seat at the table, who can extend that table to make it wider and longer, for more Africans to take their place."

'My work is about showing what Africa looks like now.'

Now he makes it a point to collaborate with young people whenever possible. "It's a privilege to have a platform," he says. That extends to his wardrobe. Stuurman doesn't just photograph style icons; he is one. His personal goal is to wear at least one locally made item a day. "Every time you support a local designer," he says, "you're buying more than just a product; you are buying them time." Time in the spotlight, that is—telling a new story about what Africa is, and what it can be.

PHOTOGRAPH BY AART VERRIPS FOR TIME

NEXT
GENERATION
LEADERS

AFGHANISTAN / 27

Zarifa Ghafari

Standing firm in the face of violence

BY SUYIN HAYNES

Death threats, assassination attempts and the murder of her father have not stopped Zarifa Ghafari from doing her job as mayor of Maidan Shahr, Afghanistan. As violent attacks increase in the wake of the U.S. announcement that it would withdraw its troops, she's vowing that those won't stop her either. "For more than 60 years, men have had all the opportunities, but they haven't succeeded or found solutions for ongoing conflicts," she says. "I'm so confident that we, as women, can do better than anyone else."

Ghafari grew up against the backdrop of war, and she recounts the disruption and devastation caused by terrorist attacks during her daily commute to school. Now in her third year running a town in the conservative province of Maidan Wardak near the capital, Kabul, 27-year-old Ghafari is Afghanistan's youngest mayor and one of very few women to hold such a post.

Her appointment by Afghanistan's President was met with protests and challenges, which prevented her from taking office for nine months. But once she arrived, she got to work—firing officials in an effort to weed out corruption, embarking on urban-planning and environmental projects, and creating plans for children's play areas and women-only marketplaces. "It is and it always was for me to try to prove the power of women, to prove the ability of women," she says.

Her success has come at great personal cost. After Ghafari survived three assassination attempts, her father was murdered in front of his house in Kabul last November. Days before she spoke to TIME, a bombing at a girls' school in the capital killed more than 80 people, mostly young students, and injured more than 140. The attack provoked a raw reaction in Ghafari and sparked memories of her own family's tragedy. "I remember my mom's shouts and cries. I remember my sister's cries. I remember my brother's tears, their pain. I remember how hard it is to still live and be here in this country," she says.

But Ghafari remains hopeful, and proud to represent a generation of young women in Afghanistan. "What makes me more powerful, what keeps me brave, is my confidence and commitment," she says. "That's why I'm still here, still doing my job."



JIM HUYLEBROEK—THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX





MORY SACKO

COOKING UP CHANGE

By Vivienne Walt

THE NEWEST STAR OF PARIS' RESTAURANT SCENE has spent his 28 years enjoying big, noisy dinners. Raised by Malian immigrant parents in France, Mory Sacko and his eight siblings crowded at night around platters of their mother's spicy West African cooking. "Dinner was always a party," he says.

Now the party has come to him. Sacko left school at 14 and later worked in some of the most renowned kitchens in the French capital, learning from haute cuisine masters at establishments like the Shangri-La and Mandarin Oriental.

In September he opened his first restaurant, MoSuke, in the Montparnasse district, offering a fusion of African, French and Japanese flavors, the latter inspired by anime he watched on TV as a child. In the two months before a nationwide lockdown shut all restaurants, the pocket-size eatery won rave reviews and earned a Michelin star. "It was as fast as it gets," he says. "I was not expecting it at all."

Then, in February, Sacko was made host of *Cuisine Ouverte* (Open Kitchen), a new show on French TV where he cooks alongside a different famous chef each week, tweaking French classics like bouillabaisse with his own diverse influences. Sacko says the network was "courageous" to have picked him—6 ft. 5 in., with dreadlocks, the child of African immigrants—as host. "We expected a sh-tstorm."

Instead the show has been a hit, drawing up to 1.6 million viewers and heralding a cultural moment. Debuting as France has been grappling with fraught issues of racial identity, it offers a radically updated version of one of the country's most cherished traditions. "People are very enthusiastic," Sacko says. "It really is a sign that there is change in France."

For millions who might never eat at MoSuke, it has also cemented Sacko as a new kind of national icon. Some have written to him from poor neighborhoods, he says, saying his recognition has led them to dream of becoming a chef, rather than a singer or a footballer. "I find myself in this position as a role model," he says. "That is not necessarily what I was expecting. I was cooking to cook, to have fun. But it is a great pride."

PHOTOGRAPH BY EDGAR BERG FOR TIME

TimeOff

HEROES AND VILLAINS
Onscreen, baddies like Cruella de Vil take center stage with their origin stories



INSIDE

A MUSLIM PUNK BAND ROCKS THE SMALL SCREEN

AUTHOR CASEY MCQUISTON'S "MAGIC SUBWAY LESBIANS"

THE RISE OF POP PRODIGY OLIVIA RODRIGO

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHELLE URRA FOR TIME

MOVIES

Is it time to retire the villain origin story?

By Stephanie Zacharek



EVEN IF THE SLOGAN "FAIR AND BALANCED" HAS been retired by the conservative news network that used it for years, the damage caused by its shifty logic endures: There are two equally valid sides to every story. Every warped viewpoint must be weighed seriously for any grain of truth it might contain. If you shout loudly enough, down is actually up. We're now stuck with this legacy, and it's so ingrained that it shows up even in the most unlikely places. In particular, you'll find it in the villain origin story, a long-simmering trend that exploded with Todd Phillips' 2019 Batman-nemesis apologia *Joker.* This month, Craig Gillespie's *Cruella* hops on the backstory bandwagon.

Cruella devises a biography for the *101 Dalmatians* villainess Cruella de Vil, she of the spotted fur coat and duotone hairdo (who, though she's now most famous as a Disney creation, was the invention of English writer Dodie Smith, who described her vividly in the delightful 1956 novel that spawned the Disney properties in the first place). This Cruella—played by Emma Stone—is an aspiring fashion designer in 1970s London, who's set on the bad-gal rail when, aflame with her own ambitions, she goes to work for a ruthless baroness (Emma Thompson) who heads her own fashion house. Like another Disney villain, Maleficent, who already has two films of her own, she's a misunderstood woman who's just trying to make her way. According to villain-backstory logic, evil behavior doesn't just happen; it's caused, often because a sensitive individual is unable to adjust to an unfair, sometimes cruel, world.

The word *misunderstood* is key to all villain backstories, whether we're talking about TV's *Ratched,* which details the origins of the most infamous psychiatric nurse in literature and movies, or Broadway's *Wicked,* which unmelts the legend of Oz's Wicked Witch of the West. These works are sometimes fun, excuses for whacked-out makeup and hairdos and cartoonishly exaggerated performances. But they're also convenient vehicles for big entertainment franchises to expand their empires. At what point do we ask for more?

In the early days of comic strips, comic books and adventure serials, the role of villains was relatively simple: they were foils, figures whose badness was a delectable given, designed to contrast as boldly as possible with the selflessness of heroes. At the same time, they were free in a way heroes are not. Their job was to behave badly, often with irresistible glamour on their side. (Hello there, Catwoman.) They could be just as compelling as heroes, often more so. And because most of us strive to be good most of the time, it's cathartic to give in now and then to the allure of being bad. We don't need to work that hard to identify with most villains. Certain aspects of their characters—like the desire to break stuff, for no good reason—are also alive in us. We just know better than to give those urges free rein.

The animated version of Cruella de Vil, from Disney's 1961 One Hundred and One Dalmatians



BUT SOMEWHERE along the way—a development nurtured, if not born, in the comic-book world with Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's dazzling 1988 graphic novel *Batman: The Killing Joke*—villains began to push their way to the foreground. No longer just breaking stuff for no good reason, they were now pleading for our understanding—sometimes, as in Phillips' *Joker,* with the cloying neediness of a thrift-store clown painting. Now we're stuck with villain

ONE HUNDRED AND ONE DALMATIANS: DISNEY/ALAMY; CRUELLA: DISNEY



Emma Stone, with Paul Walter Hauser and Joel Fry, stars in Cruella, *a backstory for the dalmatian-stealing Cruella de Vil*

backstories that are little more than rote exercises in psychological depth, stories that sap our imagination rather than igniting it. It's no longer enough to just accept, and revel in, a character's badness, allowing their miscreant behavior its own aroma of mystery. Now we get elaborate explanations of why and how, in stories that build an illusion of moral complexity even when, in reality, they risk nothing at all. To borrow a line from Jean Renoir's *The Rules of the Game,* "In this world, there is one awful thing, and that is that everyone has his reasons." Among our fictional bad guys, reasons have taken the place of the glorious, naked id. Villains are no longer enigmatic, exciting cautionary figures; they're homework.

The Joker suffers from untreated mental illness and lives in a world where people just don't care enough. Maleficent is jilted by a swain who prefers power to love. Cruella, before she becomes a psychotic fashion plate, is simply Estella, a troublemaking schoolgirl who suffers a devastating personal loss that she believes is her fault. These stories, sometimes entertaining but often wearing their earnestness on their sleeves even so, don't illuminate the mystery of human behavior. They merely stitch a diagnosis to it, the equivalent of the psychiatrist's intentionally drab monologue at the end of *Psycho,* but without Hitchcock's final, chilly kicker—the acknowledgment that in the end, there's evil in the world that just can't be rationally explained.

Villains are no longer enigmatic, exciting cautionary figures; they're homework

How did we reach this point? For the past 30 years or so, people who grew up reading comic books—people who, as kids, felt they were outsiders, misunderstood by the world at large or even just by their parents—have become increasingly invested in their identity as a downtrodden minority, a leftover rationalization from the days, in the 1930s, '40s and '50s, when comics really were treated as the end of civilization as we know it. But now this alleged minority of underappreciated iconoclasts is the driving force behind several multibillion-dollar entertainment franchises. They can no longer differentiate themselves from the mass audience because they *are* the mass audience. Idolizing superheroes is no longer anything special, which may be why it now seems more sophisticated to sympathize with the villains—even if that means reading depth into these backstories that isn't really there.

THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE. Bothsidesism and whataboutism are thriving in our era like spiky, poisonous weeds, and if villain backstories aren't a cause of that problem, they're surely a symptom. Villains are bad—but they have good reasons for being bad. They're capable of terrible things—but only because we have failed to understand them. We live in a world of people demanding to be heard—not just those who have been genuinely disenfranchised for decades and centuries, but also those who merely feel they're under attack.

The Black Lives Matter protests of last summer ignited the self-righteous anger of white people who needed to tell the world that their lives mattered too. According to some, the rioters who stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6 were really just tourists showing up to have a look around, decent people whose actions have been grossly misread. And even as we crawl, slowly, out of a pandemic that has killed millions and slowed down the world, we're still dealing with noisy know-it-alls who claim the virus isn't real, or who refuse vaccination for nebulous, if not delusional, reasons.

Respecting every viewpoint, including those of villains, only results in a murky gray mass where none are respected at all. When bullying and bleeding hearts unite, understanding and forgiveness are turned into a performative rite that means nothing at all. ☐



Furious five: the women of *Lady Parts*

REVIEW

A punk revolution, Muslim-girl-style

By Judy Berman

FOR ANY BAND FORMED OUTSIDE A BOARDROOM, THE disastrous first gig is a rite of passage. Kiss debuted to fewer than 10 people. The Velvet Underground sang about heroin at a high school. And in a new Peacock comedy, a London punk act called Lady Parts performs for the first time in a pub lousy with jeering white guys. "Your husband let you out the house tonight?" one man cracks as the band—four Muslim women of color—takes the stage. They ignore him, launching into a noisy rendition of "9 to 5" and trading looks of astonished joy.

The scene has infectious energy. Yet what's most remarkable about it is that although it takes place two-thirds of the way through *We Are Lady Parts'* electrifying premiere season, it constitutes the show's first real depiction of misogyny and Islamophobia. That's not to say the show is set in a fantasyland or that these women don't struggle to navigate hybrid identities. But creator Nida Manzoor understands how to tell a culturally specific story without reducing the characters' experience to a constant confrontation with adversity.

Like most young adults, the members of Lady Parts are building lives for themselves. Saira (Sarah Kameela Impey), the brash front woman, grapples with whether committing to a boyfriend would mean sacrificing her radical ideals. Bassist Bisma (Faith Omole) is a mom who draws comics about a group of women who murder while menstruating. When she's not drumming, surly Ayesha (Juliette Motamed) drives an Uber, blasting metal to drown out rude riders. Rumored to wear a face covering because she's in hiding, manager Momtaz (Lucie Shorthouse) hypes the band using skills learned hawking lingerie.

They find an unlikely lead guitarist in protagonist Amina (Anjana Vasan), a timid microbiology grad student who's fruitlessly pursuing an arranged marriage. A combination of propriety and vomit-inducing stage fright has kept her from going public with her virtuosic guitar chops, but she joins Lady Parts for an audition in exchange for a setup with Ayesha's hot brother (Zaqi Ismail). The arrangement is supposed to be temporary. Yet playing in a band reveals how much she has in common with these misfits—namely, a thirst for rebellion and an untapped reservoir of rage.

Cross-cultural comedy has thrived on TV ever since the Jeffersons moved in near the Bunkers

CROSS-CULTURAL COMEDY HAS thrived on TV ever since the Jeffersons moved in near the Bunkers. Even Chuck Lorre, the human sitcom factory who spent decades cranking out mostly white multicam hits, has recently pivoted to stories of culture clash: *Bob Hearts Abishola* finds a white sock magnate falling for a Nigerian nurse; *United States of Al* brings an Afghan interpreter to live with his Marine buddy.

Shows like these have evolved enough, by now, to avoid exoticizing outsiders. Instead, the recurring joke is that white Americans and their immigrant and minority neighbors find each other's customs equally perplexing. If this represents some measure of progress, it also flattens characters on both sides of the cultural divide to mere representatives of a certain group.

There's a lot to love about *We Are Lady Parts.* The dialogue is sharp, and Vasan endearingly vulnerable. There are trippy animations, clever pop-culture homages, catchy songs. Rarer is that Manzoor lets the characters speak for themselves, declining to spoon-feed explanations of their feminism or their religious beliefs or their headscarves or their lack thereof. Lady Parts don't show up to their first gig looking to teach a lesson in tolerance. Like Kiss and VU before them, they've come to rock.

WE ARE LADY PARTS *arrives June 3 on Peacock*

WE ARE LADY PARTS: LAURA RADFORD—PEACOCK



Lucy (Temple) looks inward

REVIEW

Birds of prey

Don't get too excited. Starz's *Little Birds* is not a faithful adaptation of Anaïs Nin's erotic story collection, which wouldn't fly even on premium cable. But with its colorful and provocative transgressions, the six-part drama certainly honors the queen of literary smut.

The series unfurls in the decadent environs of Tangier in 1955. Lucy (Juno Temple at her fizzy best) is an American heiress straight out of a luxury asylum, who's come to Morocco to marry a broke British lord, Hugo (an anxious Hugh Skinner). Though she radiates free-floating lust, he won't touch her. What she doesn't know is that he's gay; what he doesn't know is that her arms-manufacturer dad expects him to close deals with Morocco's French occupiers. Soon to cross paths with these expats is dominatrix Cherifa (Yumna Marwan, ferocious), who delights in making her "French piggy" clients squeal but is also starting to make the colonial authorities nervous.

Political subtext abounds. Like its inspiration, the show is attuned to sex as an expression of power, though its insights on the topic aren't entirely new. Better to watch for the escapist pleasure of a jewel-toned melodrama that evokes Fellini and Almodóvar as much as it does Nin. *—J.B.*

LITTLE BIRDS *premieres June 6 on Starz*

REVIEW

A *Story* unfit for a King

APPLE TV+ HAS BUILT A DECENT CASE, since launching in November 2019, for its existence. What's surprising is that it's done so not with the splashy, spendy dramas it keeps rolling out, from *The Morning Show* to *The Mosquito Coast,* but on comedies: *Ted Lasso, Dickinson, Mythic Quest*. Sadly, *Lisey's Story* marks another high-profile miss for the platform.

The list of talent rivals that of all-star projects like *Big Little Lies*. Stephen King adapted his own acclaimed novel into this psychological thriller, directed by Pablo Larraín *(Jackie)* and executive-produced by J.J. Abrams, which casts Julianne Moore as the eponymous widow of Scott (Clive Owen), a famous author. Two years after his death, Lisey remains unmoored, living in a fancied-up farmhouse cluttered with his detritus. A breakup leaves her delicate sister Amanda (Joan Allen) catatonic and institutionalized, further stressing Lisey's tense relationship with the bitter third sister, Darla (Jennifer Jason Leigh).

Meanwhile, a professor (Ron Cephas Jones) who's been bugging Lisey to give him Scott's papers unwittingly sics one of the author's unhinged fans on her. Jim Dooley (Dane DeHaan) is your typical quirky horror psycho: a violent, woman-hating man-child who always seems to be chomping on junk food. But he's not the only monster in Lisey's life. Equally fearsome are her memories of conversations with her husband that she willfully repressed—accounts of the bleak childhood that led him to a career fleshing out fantasy worlds.

Moore and Owen could play their roles from beyond the grave. The rural backdrops have a dark, eerie natural beauty. But technical competence can't save a skeletal plot held together by pseudo psychology or a script pocked with bad lines. "Stop pushing me, Scott," Lisey pleads, hilariously, at one point. "You're dead, so stop."

While King romanticizes the relationship between mental illness and creativity, Larraín's direction reduces both elements to camp. Most frustrating of all is the show's heroine. Lisey exists solely as a relic of Scott; her suffering on his behalf is depicted with sadistic glee. If this is commentary on the misogyny directed at the self-sacrificing wives of men revered as great artists, it might've helped to give the character a discernible personality. —J.B.

LISEY'S STORY *comes to Apple TV+ on June 4*



Lisey (Moore) loves her dead, brilliant husband

PROFILE

Casey McQuiston masters the art of feel-good fiction

By Annabel Gutterman



MACIEK JASIK FOR TIME

THREE WORDS CAME TO CASEY McQuiston while she was taking a bath: *magic subway lesbians.* The author has always been drawn to romances that seem a little impossible—ones that show that the power of love can transcend anything, even time and space. "I know that sounds very corny," McQuiston says, gazing at the Manhattan skyline from a picnic table across the East River.

But so what if it's corny? Corny can be nice. Corny can make you feel good. Which is what McQuiston, 30, has set out to do with her fiction. Her 2019 debut novel, *Red, White & Royal Blue,* about the relationship between the Prince of Wales and America's first son, was an instant and unexpected success: the book found an eager audience without any of the conventional launchpads, like a celebrity book club or splashy publicity campaign. Instead, word of mouth spread on social media, landing the book on the New York *Times* best-seller list. It's now being adapted as a film by Amazon Studios. "I wrote a book that made my brain buzz and was fun and what I want to read," McQuiston says. "I always felt that if the book could find its people—other depressed queer millennials—it could do well. But I've been blown away."

Her second novel, *One Last Stop,* arriving June 1, follows 23-year-old August, a cynical college student who arrives in New York City with a blasé attitude and low expectations. Then, on her commute to class, she spots a mysterious stranger on the Q train. Her name is Jane and she might just be the most beautiful girl August has ever seen. Their chemistry is immediate. But there's a problem: Jane's been stuck on the subway since the 1970s.

> ***'I just want to write my gay little books and show people a good time.'***
>
> **CASEY MCQUISTON,** on writing rom-coms to bring her readers joy

Like *Red, White & Royal Blue,* McQuiston's latest revels in the delightfulness of its premise. There are sweeping gestures, bountiful sexual tension and a steamy scene over the Manhattan Bridge that succeeds at making a subway ride romantic. McQuiston, who moved to New York from Colorado in 2020, was struck by the fantastical experience of being on a train underground. "When you're in a tunnel and going one way, and a train passes the other way, there's this strobing effect where you look across and you can see 0.0005 seconds of 500 other people's lives," she says. "I think that's the closest thing you can get to feeling like you're traveling through time."

MCQUISTON KNOWS that most New Yorkers probably don't feel so warm and fuzzy about the subway. But she was raised in southern Louisiana, where



< *McQuiston, who grew up in Louisiana, shares with readers her characters' birth charts and playlists she used for inspiration while writing*

underground public transit doesn't exist. "To me, getting on a train is like, 'Wow, this is just like in the movies!'" she exclaims. McQuiston talks a lot about cinematic moments—she's a sucker for a big musical cue that ends with a kiss. Growing up, she loved romantic comedies like *You've Got Mail, 10 Things I Hate About You* and *13 Going on 30*. Her formative years were also shaped by attending a conservative evangelical Christian school from kindergarten to 12th grade. "Anybody who's been through queer religious trauma has ways of coping with that in adulthood," she says. That's why she writes romantic comedies about queer people—books she might have loved reading as a teenager, that would have made her feel less isolated.

So it was especially important for McQuiston to write *One Last Stop* with an all-queer cast. As a self-proclaimed student of sitcoms from the past 30 years, the author noticed a pattern: if queer people were represented onscreen, it was often one queer person surrounded by straight friends. This never made sense to her: "I always thought it was silly and unrealistic, the idea that some straight people have, that it is statistically unlikely for more than one gay person to exist in the story."

The characters that fill the pages of *One Last Stop* are thoughtfully depicted and layered. There's Niko, August's trans roommate, who makes sure she's adjusting well to her new life in Flatbush. There's their lovable neighbor who lives across the hall—a drag queen with a romance of his own. And, of course, there's Jane, a punk-rock Chinese-American butch lesbian with a mysterious past.

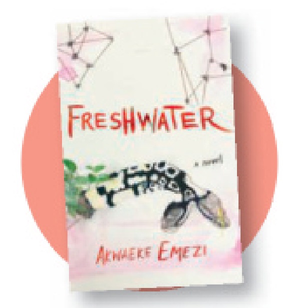
McQuiston can answer any question about her characters. When I ask what Jane's and August's birth charts are, she recites them without missing a beat. (For the record, Jane is a Gemini; August is a Virgo.) "If anything, I do too much random world building that never ends up in the book," she says. "But I think that's the secret sauce." She knows what it's like to geek out over a book or television show, and wants to provide her fans with anything that will help them connect to her characters on a deeper level.

WITH *RED, WHITE & ROYAL BLUE,* and now with *One Last Stop,* McQuiston is pushing the boundaries of the romance genre. But she's quick to note the impact of her predecessors, particularly authors of self-published and indie-published books. And she's especially grateful to the agent who took a chance on her debut when a queer rom-com that dealt with politics seemed niche and risky. "What I want for every queer author is to find an agent and editor who are going to be like, 'Yeah, let's do this,'" she says. "There are so many more books I want to read." At the same time, she says she's heartened by the growth in publishing over the past few years, and is excited to be among a class of authors who are shaping genres across the industry. She quickly lists some of her favorites: Tamsyn Muir, Brandon Taylor, Kacen Callender. "Not only are there more queer books," she says, "but the queer books that are being written are some of the best books that are coming out."

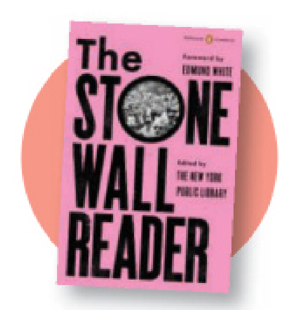
McQuiston's next novel, her young-adult debut, is another romantic comedy, but this time finds roots in something much closer to her own experiences. The book is set in the Deep South at a conservative, religious high school, much like the one that served as the backdrop of her own coming of age. Writing it, she says, forced her to extend empathy to a younger version of herself, and in doing so she created a book that would have meant a lot to her as a teenager. It's less escapist than her previous fiction, but she promises there will be just as much wish fulfillment.

As with *One Last Stop,* all McQuiston wants is for her readers to finish reading her work and feel happier than when they started. "I have no interest in fame or notoriety—I just want to write my gay little books and show people a good time," she says. "As long as I'm doing that, I'm happy." ▯

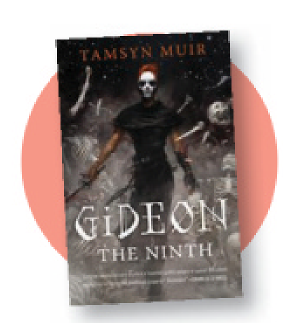
Casey McQuiston's reading list



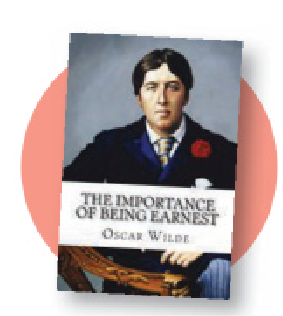
Freshwater
A Nigerian woman grapples with her many selves in Akwaeke Emezi's debut



The Stonewall Reader
The 2019 anthology revisits the 1960s fight for LGBTQ rights



Gideon the Ninth
Tamsyn Muir's epic fantasy explores a gothic solar system



The Importance of Being Earnest
Oscar Wilde's satire traces social hypocrisy in the Victorian era



Night Sky With Exit Wounds
The debut poetry collection from Ocean Vuong examines identity, pleasure and grief

REVIEW

Olivia Rodrigo's teenage dream

By Raisa Bruner



^ *Rodrigo's debut album* Sour *was released May 21 to widespread acclaim*

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A TEENAGER TO LOVE Olivia Rodrigo's music, but it certainly helps. Hitting play on *Sour,* the 18-year-old Disney star and hit singer-songwriter's debut album, out now, is a one-way ticket back to the most potent emotions of adolescence: the all-consuming heartbreak, the envy and insecurity, the sense that everything that's happening is the biggest thing that's ever happened to anyone.

Like her album, Rodrigo's rise has been intense. The January release of her chart-topping ballad "Drivers License" propelled her to the top of the pop stratosphere. (Rodrigo is the rare breakout artist to debut at No. 1 with her first single.) The success of that song led to Rodrigo being parodied on *Saturday Night Live*—then, eventually, performing on the show herself, all in a matter of months. It's fitting that everything has happened at lightning speed. Rodrigo is a digital native who lives at the crosshairs of youth culture, a pupil of the Taylor Swift school of self-disclosure and the ultimate Gen Z cypher. Her success is a formula: soul-baring vulnerability multiplied by the frenetic pace of the TikTok generation.

Rodrigo started her career in showbiz young: she was only 12 when she booked her first big commercial for Old Navy, and 13 when she made her Disney debut on the show *Bizaardvark.* Her starring role in Disney's *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series* as Nini Salazar-Roberts, the female lead opposite actor Joshua Bassett, made her a sensation with tweens and teens; like Miley Cyrus and Selena Gomez before her, Rodrigo had a following as an actor that doubled as a springboard.

BUT "DRIVERS LICENSE," Rodrigo's big break, was more than just another actor trying her hand at pop stardom—it's an instant classic. The song begins with the sound of the ringing from an open car door, something so familiar and mundane that it evokes a lifetime of sense memories. The high school nostalgia is cross-generational. The melody is strong. The bridge is huge. And, perhaps best of all, the song has a mysterious backstory: fans of the show believe the song was written about the end of Rodrigo's relationship with Bassett, which has only amplified its appeal, although Rodrigo has been cagey about the song's autobiographical basis.

Beyond the grist it provided for the gossip mill, "Drivers License" hit the jackpot when it became the subject of a viral TikTok trend, in which users re-created a scene from Rodrigo's music video. It's not the first time TikTok has bolstered an artist's ascent; Lil Nas X's "Old Town Road" also found its footing there, and his star continues to rise—an indicator that even if the app's many trends are short-lived, some of its winners can make it big and build careers off the platform.

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Rodrigo's debut album *Sour* certainly feels more like an artistic statement than like a newly minted sensation cashing in. There are shades of surprising pop-punk amid the acoustic balladry; you'll hear echoes of not just Taylor Swift but also Fiona Apple, Avril Lavigne and Lorde. Like Rodrigo, all these songwriters found ways to turn their deepest wounds into art, mining their pain for catharsis that would resonate widely. But unlike her predecessors, Rodrigo's references are distinctly Gen Z: she sings about watching reruns of *Glee,* a show that debuted in 2009. Aesthetically, everything from her album cover to her Instagram is a nod to her age, a slew of pastel colors and cooler-than-you photo shoots that show off her trendy fashion sense.

But her sound, from the punk angst of album starter "Brutal" to the bedroom-pop minimalism of "Enough for You," is harder to pin down. "I'm so sick of 17/ Where's my f-cking teenage dream? If someone tells me one more time, 'Enjoy your youth,' I'm gonna cry," she rants on "Brutal." Remember being 17? Likely, you felt that way too. ◻

8 Questions

Patti Harrison The actor and comedian on her first leading role, rom-coms and her hopes for transgender characters in entertainment

You've been called a scene stealer for your appearances in several series and films. How does it feel to be in your first lead role in *Together Together*? It definitely is exciting, and it's nerve-racking. I've never had to look at my face this much onscreen, which is its own hell. I'm trying not to over-obsess because I will get overwhelmed by anxiety if I do.

In *Together Together*, your character Anna is hired as a gestational surrogate by Matt [Ed Helms]. What drew you to this story? I first thought the script was gonna be some sh-tty rom-com that does a lot of gross things and falls into a lot of these stomach-churning tropes I've seen a million times. When I read the script, it sets a lot of those things up and lays out those expectations, but as it went on, it was subverting a lot of those. I thought it was just so razor-sharp, in this very gentle way.

The film's ending is left open and ambiguous. Do you think we have too many expectations of romantic comedies and how they should end? There are all of these structural expectations we have from watching movies that are so formulaic. A trope is that storybook ending where every end is tied up in a bow and it feels great because they lived happily ever after. That is so far from the point of this movie.

What was your relationship to romantic comedies as a viewer growing up? I'm not a huge fan of the genre, but I loved *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* growing up, *While You Were Sleeping*, *Sleepless in Seattle*. I have seen a billion rom-coms, but the majority I've been hate-watching on purpose, to laugh at them and not with them.

'I HAVE SEEN A BILLION ROM-COMS, BUT THE MAJORITY I'VE BEEN HATE-WATCHING ON PURPOSE'



You've done improv, stand-up, sketch, voice acting, and more traditional film and TV roles now. Where do you feel most at home as a performer? Comedy. I think that is just more familiar. Being a comedian is so fun, and there's so much autonomy to it. I don't want to be solely a dramatic actor. It's such an important part of my quality of life to goof around and talk about my farts.

How would you describe your sense of humor? I feel cringey to say it out loud. I like absurd stuff, I like the silly stuff. I definitely have a dark sense of humor, and in ways I think that comes from having a lot of childhood trauma—a little bit, not fully. I'm trying to be lighter in my adult life.

You recently won an Annie Award for writing an episode of *Big Mouth* featuring the story line of a transgender teenager, Natalie. How do you feel about the impact of that? I hope there's more opportunities for trans characters in animated series, where they're there beyond just to tell a story about them being trans. I hope there's that opportunity for a character to be voiced by a trans actor and we may or may not know that character is trans, that it's not important to their story. That is what I hope for the future, in general—not just in animation.

How do you feel about Instagram? I think out of the three big social media accounts—Instagram, Twitter and TikTok—Instagram is the least emotionally violent on you every day. The more followers I get, the more stressful it is and the more criticism I get from random accounts. I'm trying to be better at just not paying it any mind. There's other things to live for. —SUYIN HAYNES

CHANTAL ANDERSON—THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX









